Commentary
August 1998

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Books in Review

Aleksa Djilas • Steven C. Munson • Gary Rosen
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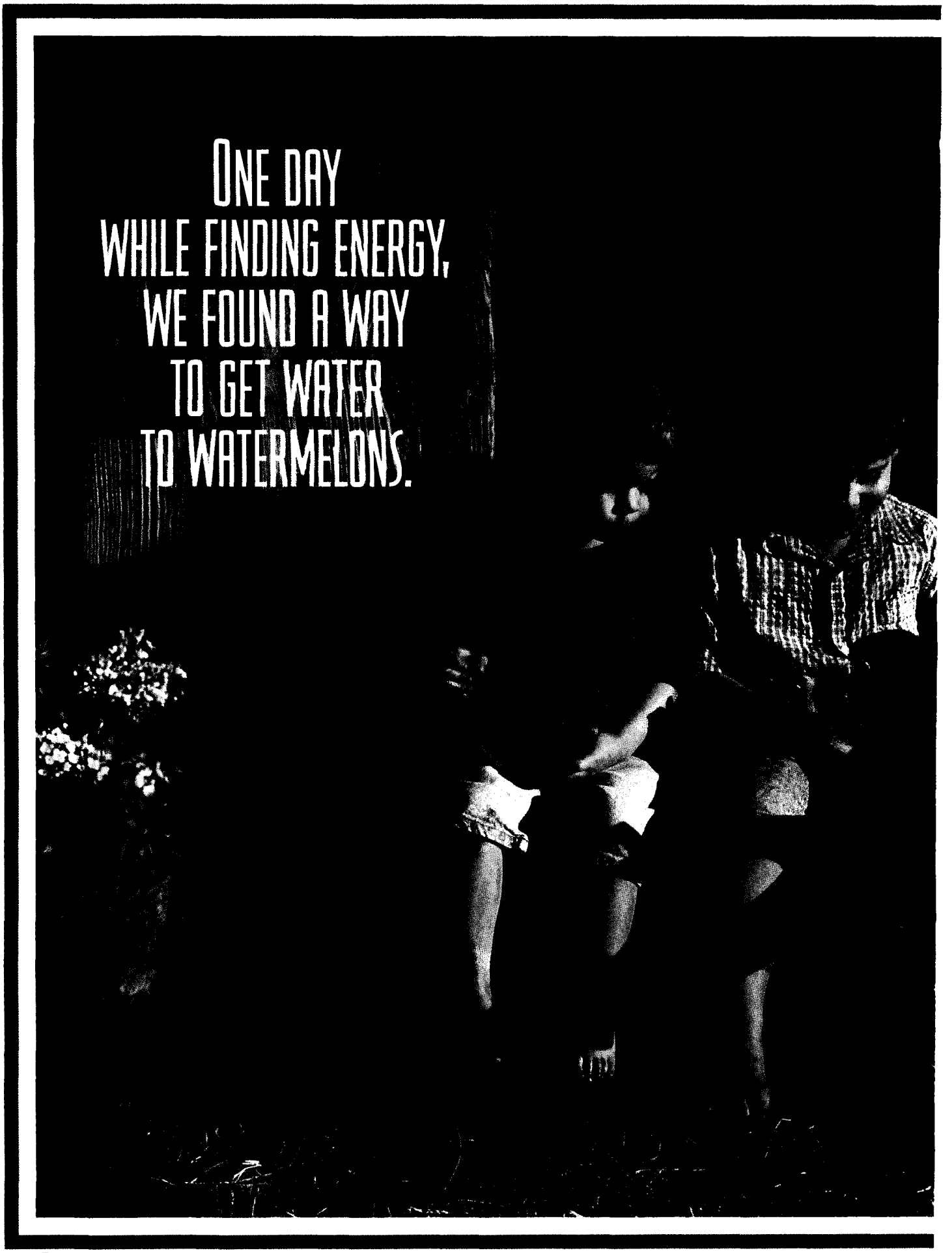

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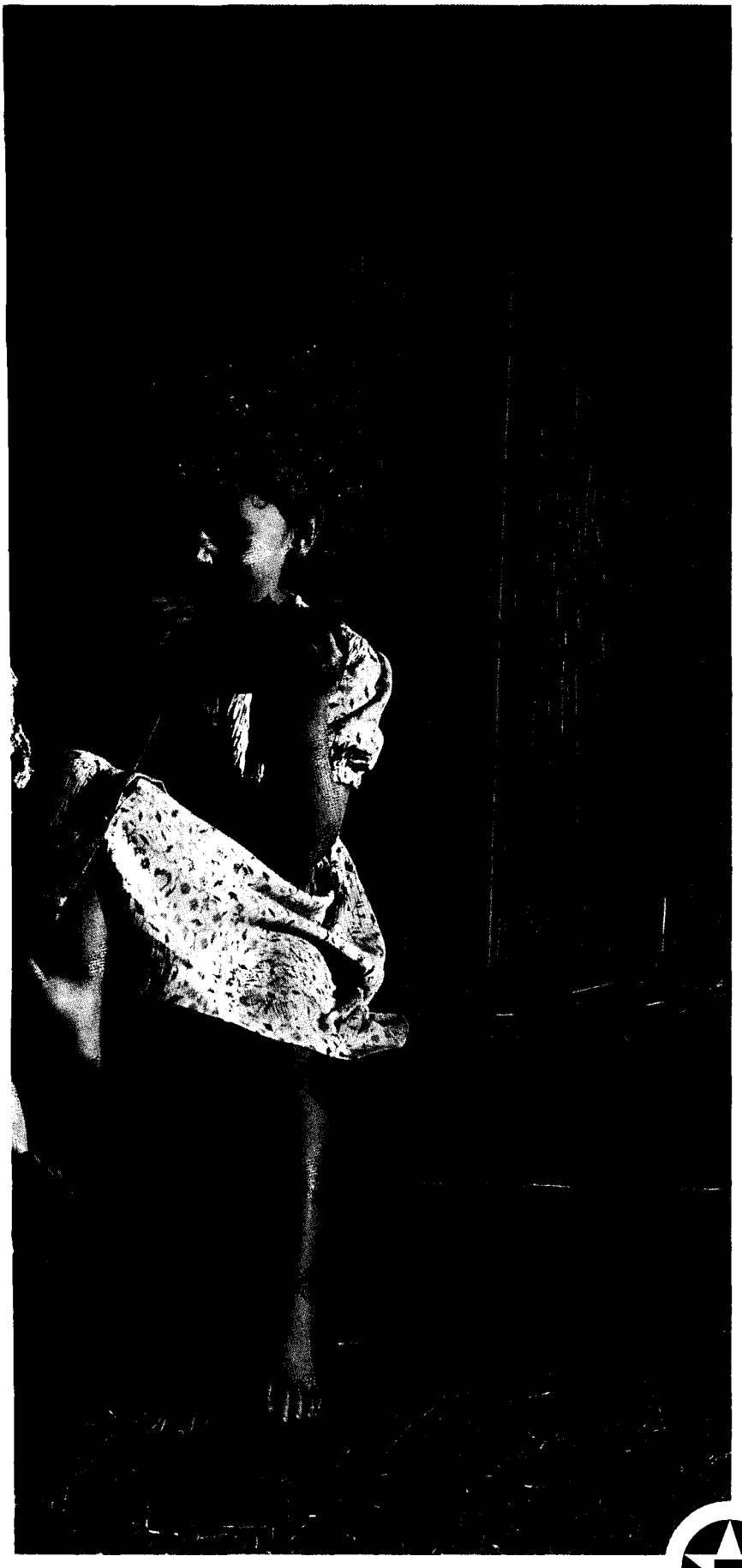

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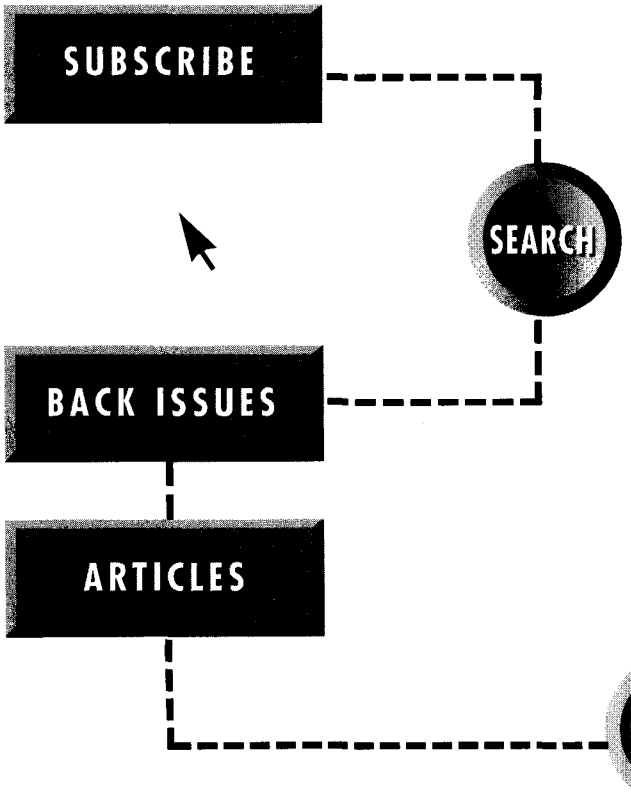

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Commentary
August 1998

Letters from Readers

Israel and the United States

To the Editor:

I enjoyed reading Norman Podhoretz's "Israel and the United States: A Complex History" [May], as I have enjoyed reading just about all his Commentary articles over the years. I find his viewpoint on matters involving Israel akin to mine. I am writing to correct two assertions in the article, although the errors do not alter its thrust.

In discussing the 1973 war, Mr. Podhoretz writes: "In the first two days of war alone, 2,000 Israeli soldiers were killed and 340 captured, while 49 planes were shot down and 500 tanks destroyed." This is incorrect. The 2,000 figure should have been for killed *and* wounded. During the first two days of the war, Israel suffered approximately 1,200 battle casualties (killed or wounded) on the Egyptian front and 700 casualties on the Syrian front. Moreover, the official Israeli figure for *all* deaths for the entire war is 2,838. Even granting that this figure is probably 10 percent too low, since it does not include those soldiers who were wounded and died from their wounds at a later point, in estimating losses one must also consider the fact that the largest battles of the war were fought *after* the first two days.

The figures on jet aircraft and tanks lost are also inflated. Israel lost a total of 103 jet aircraft during the war. Of these, 28 were downed during the first two days. Israel lost only 258 tanks during the first two days and approximately 850 in the entire war.

Mr. Podhoretz's comment regarding the "brilliant generalship" of Ariel Sharon is misplaced, although quite understandable because in searching for a new Israeli war hero, many journalists found a convenient one in General Sharon. Although he distinguished himself in the 1967 war and before that, in the 1950's, as commander of Unit 101, Sharon's generalship in the 1973 war was average at best. I state that based on the following facts. During the third week of the war, Sharon led Israeli forces across the Suez Canal. But after the Canal crossing, his progress was abysmally slow. Indeed, given the element of surprise; the fact that Sharon was facing part of the Egyptian Second Army devoid of most of its armor; the availability of ground support as a result of the destruction of some Egyptian SAM missile sites; and the fast-eroding morale of the Egyptian forces after the second week of the war, Sharon should have been able to trap the Egyptian Second Army much the same way General Bren Adan was able to trap the Egyptian Third Army. But by the end of the war, Sharon was not even close to this goal.

It is also the case that Sharon owes what limited success he achieved to the fact that his superior officers refused to take his advice. Sharon argued strenuously for the authority to cross the Canal as early as the second day of the war. In this he was opposed by General Shmuel Gonen of the Southern Command, chief of staff David Elazar, and General Haim Bar-Lev. What these three generals understood was that given the early unanticipated losses, good generalship dictated waiting until Egypt had committed its armored reserves into the fray on the Israeli side of the canal before any attempt was made to cross it.

As it happened, at the end of the second week of the war, Egypt did commit its armored reserves to the Israeli side of the Canal, in part to relieve the pressure on the Syrians who were clearly losing by then. What followed was the much-ballyhooed largest tank battle since World War II, which Israel won in decisive fash-

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ion. In fact, this was the turning point of the war against Egypt because without it, a successful Canal crossing would not have been possible. Had his superiors followed Sharon's advice, the war would likely have ended quite differently, with greater loss of life for Israel.

GIL EHRENKRANZ
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

May I offer one correction to Norman Podhoretz's history of United States-Israel relations? Mr. Podhoretz correctly notes that Secretary of State George Marshall opposed U.S. recognition of Israel, but President Truman's decision to override Marshall was not taken after "Stalin . . . had already beaten [Truman] to the punch." In fact, the United States extended recognition to the new state within minutes of its proclamation on May 14, 1948. Soviet recognition did not come until two days later, although it was *de jure* while that of the United States was *de facto*.

HENRY FETTER
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR:

In his lucid and penetrating analysis, Norman Podhoretz concludes that any peace movement is doomed to failure until a change of heart toward Israel occurs in the Arab world. In Mr. Podhoretz's view, such a change will eventually come about through the impact upon the Arabs of the forces of "modernization and democratization" that are currently affecting nations throughout the world. Though not identified, these forces are clearly those of free-market capitalism, which, indeed, have the power to break down barriers and elevate standards of living for all. In fact, such forces are just beginning to work their magic in Israel as a result of Benjamin Netanyahu's admirable new domestic economic policies, though there is a long way to go to root out government controls and regulatory policies that still impede Israel's progress toward a better society.

Prosperity in Israel alone, however, accompanied by poverty among its neighbors, is a recipe for disaster. To achieve peace, free-market capitalism must be brought to the entire area through a Middle East economic community comparable to the European community, the North and South American free-trade area, and the Southeast Asia economic communities. The development of these regional economic communities is a worldwide phenomenon, but the Middle East so far appears to be a lonely exception.

If the goal of a Middle East economic community could be achieved, religious and other barriers would be eradicated, living standards elevated, and prosperity throughout the entire area would follow. However far off that day might be, I suggest that it is essential to view the question of Middle East peace as one of regional market capitalism.

In this connection, it should be noted that the eminent political philosopher F.A. Hayek, writing as an eyewitness at the time of the rise of Nazism and fascism in Europe, emphasized in his classic work *The Road to Serfdom* that anti-Semitism is rooted in anti-capitalism. If regional market capitalism is the key to Middle East peace, it is to be hoped that Norman Podhoretz would lend his prestige and eminence to the support of such a movement, since its goals are so close to the goals he advocates for the U.S.

One other point. In addition to opposing the current peace movement, Mr. Podhoretz denounces it as causing "unwitting harm," presumably because giving up the Golan Heights and part or all of the West Bank would weaken Israel's military potential. There is a curious incongruity here. Mr.

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Podhoretz foresees a future military outbreak taking the form of a missile battle with biological and chemical warheads coming from Iraq and Iran and nuclear warheads coming from Israel. What the significance of giving up the Golan Heights and parts of the West Bank might be in light of such missile warfare involving Iran, Iraq, and Israel—not necessarily Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians—needs further explanation.

MAURICE ROSENFIELD
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

Norman Podhoretz provides an excellent description and analysis of the history of the relations between Israel and the United States. Had he stopped there, I would find nothing to criticize in his findings, including the fact that there is no readiness in the Arab world to make peace with Israel. However, Mr. Podhoretz chooses to recommend a policy to deal with the situation.

Apparently, he presumes that the cause of Arab aggression is a lack of modernization and democratization on the part of the nations of the Middle East. This materialist thesis attributes moral and ideological failings to conditions rather than beliefs. It follows the prevailing view that people are not bad, but in need only of support to change their ways. Here Mr. Podhoretz unwittingly shares the accommodationist philosophy of Israel. Consider his suggestion that Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres erred because they had become war-weary; that moral pressures had been exerted on them; that Israel had lost the *intifada*; and that it had been prevented from retaliating in the Gulf war. However, a different moral perspective, an understanding of what is right, would have led Rabin and Peres along other paths, including serious retaliation during the *intifada* and the Gulf war.

The Arabs believe that the existence of Israel is an abomination they must destroy; the Israelis believe that, in the long run, the way to deal with aggression is by accommodation; the Americans believe in supporting all nations (rather than differentiating among those that favor and those that undermine Western civilization). Such beliefs are not changed by conditions but rather by a vision of truth and justice. At that point, a sound policy becomes evident, namely, to resist aggression.

ALLEN WEINGARTEN
Morristown, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

As Norman Podhoretz notes in his insightful article, the modernizing and democratizing forces that have been successful around the world have not spread to the Middle East. But if democracy were to come to the Middle East, there is a strong possibility that in most of the Arab world, free elections would mean the victory of religious fundamentalists.

I do not think that the Muslim/Arab world will achieve and enjoy democracy during Mr. Podhoretz's lifetime, or mine.

SHELDON RABINOWITZ
Des Moines, Iowa

TO THE EDITOR:

The articles in the May issue commemorating the 50th anniversary of Israel were excellent. I would like to emphasize the ambivalence of the relationship between the United States and Israel. In every major war and crisis Israel has had in my 74-year lifetime, the U.S. government reversed the victory or diminished its scope.

In 1956, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and President Dwight D. Eisenhower successfully reversed the outcome of the Suez war, in which England and France had acted as Israel's partner. In each of the subsequent wars of Arab aggression—1967 and 1973—concessions were made at the behest of the U.S. that weakened and diluted Israeli

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victories. Even in 1982, with the friendliest U.S. administration ever, President Ronald Reagan was misled into denying Israel its victory.

Had the U.S. not interfered in each of these critical episodes in Israel's history, we might not need a "peace process" now.

I do not deny that many times the U.S. government gave Israel valuable support. But there is no doubt in my mind that the most important thing Israel can now do to ensure its future is to sever its dependency on the United States and become a friend rather than a supplicant.

ALLEN H. HOLT
Manhattan Beach, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I read Norman Podhoretz's article with great interest. It looks even worse from here, because the British and Europeans embrace the Clinton-approved "it's-Israel's-fault" view and pipe it through a media conduit that is invariably hostile to Israel.

As for the Israeli "peace movement" and many Americans, they remind me of the Jews in 1930's Germany who did not believe the Germans would let the Nazis do what they said they would do—and stuck to that disbelief until it was far too late. As for the British and Europeans, they seem not to care much either way.

HERB GREER
Manchester, England

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing to say how much I appreciated Norman Podhoretz's article, "Israel and the United States: A Complex History." It should be required reading for all American Jews and Israelis.

NAOMI W. COHEN
Jerusalem, Israel

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

The figures challenged by Gil Ehrenkranz came from a scholarly paper by Sheldon L. Richman that I found on the Internet but which had originally been published under the auspices of the Cato Institute. Although—or rather because—this paper was unfriendly to Israel, I saw no reason for it to exaggerate Israel's losses, but I must admit that Mr. Ehrenkranz's numbers sound more plausible. In any case, as he himself acknowledges, the precise figures do not affect the main point I was making about the Yom Kippur War. Nor does his denigration of the role played by Ariel Sharon in that war. Here, however, as again Mr. Ehrenkranz himself acknowledges, the view on which I relied in calling Sharon's generalship "brilliant" is more widely accepted than his own by people who know more about such things than I do. Be all that as it may, I appreciate Mr. Ehrenkranz's kind words about my article and about my work in general.

Henry Fetter has also caught me out in an error. I should have said that Stalin beat Truman to the punch in extending *de-jure* recognition to Israel, and it is probably because that form of recognition is more weighty and serious than the *de-facto* kind that my memory led me into the confusion that Mr. Fetter has now straightened out. But as in the case of the numbers cited by Mr. Ehrenkranz, this has no effect on the main point I was making about the respective attitudes toward the founding of Israel by the United States and the Soviet Union.

While I am correcting errors, I might as well mention that I also got three dates wrong that none of the correspondents above noticed: the peace treaty with Jordan was signed in October 1994, before the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin; Benjamin Netanyahu was elected in 1996, not 1995; Lucius D. Battle was Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs in 1967, not 1956, though at that point he had already been in the Foreign Service.

Maurice Rosenfield can put aside any doubts he may have as to the strength of my belief in free-market capitalism, and I most certainly support Netanyahu's efforts to lead Israel in that direction. And Mr. Rosenfield is of course right in concluding that free-market capitalism was one of the forces of "modernization and democratization" of which I spoke and whose spread to the Arab world would in my judgment be a major factor in the changes without which that world will almost certainly persist in the "Great Refusal" to accept a sovereign Jewish state in its midst. But I fear that Mr. Rosenfield falls into the fallacy of "economism" or inverse Marxism when he argues that the introduction of a free market can by itself eradicate "religious and other barriers" to peace with Israel. Religious and nationalistic passions are not, as Marxist theory once supposed, merely part of the "superstructure" of society. As we all should have learned by now, they have their own autonomous existence and their power can be immune to the influence of economics or almost anything else.

In stressing this great lesson that has emerged from the experience of the 20th century, I mean to demonstrate that I am not the simple-minded proponent of the "materialist thesis" that Allen Weingarten takes me for and that I have much more sympathy for the point he himself makes than he seems to recognize. He has a part of the truth, and so does Mr. Rosenfield, and I am tempted to stand aside and let the two of them fight the issue out between themselves. (Nor am I comfortable with the idea, already being propounded in some quarters, though not by Mr. Rosenfield, that *Israel* is responsible for the economic plight of an independent Palestinian state. According to this notion, even when such a state comes into existence, it will be unable to live at peace with the neighboring Jewish state unless Israel makes sure that the Palestinians become prosperous as a result. But that is another story.) Much as I share Mr. Rosenfield's admiration for F.A. Hayek, moreover, I do not agree that anti-Semitism is rooted in anti-capitalism. Anti-Semitism existed long before capitalism came into the world, and has flourished among capitalists as well as among socialists.

Mr. Rosenfield sees a "curious incongruity" in my preoccupation with Israel's vulnerability to a conventional military attack (by the Palestinians in alliance with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan) when missiles fired from Iran and/or Iraq may pose a greater threat and can do greater damage. But the simple fact is that these two forms of military danger do indeed exist simultaneously and Israel has to prepare

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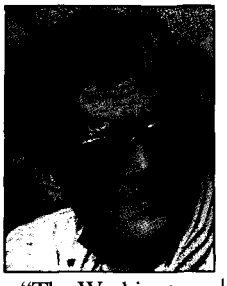

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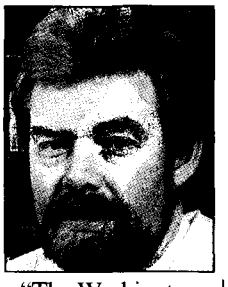

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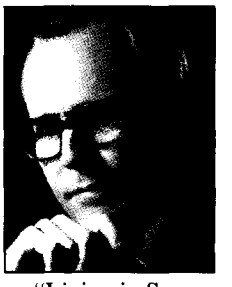

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for them both, just as the United States had to do during the cold war in maintaining strong conventional forces together with a credible nuclear deterrent. I would add that a missile-defense system is also imperative for both countries.

Sheldon Rabinowitz makes a telling argument. Free elections in the Muslim world are as likely as not to bring fundamentalists to power whose hostility to Israel (and to the forces of Westernization) knows no bounds. This has already happened in Algeria, where in 1992 the military stepped in and overthrew the results of just such a free election. But when I speak of modernization and democracy, I have something more in mind than free elections alone, which are necessary but by no means sufficient. Being neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, I have no idea whether that "something more" will materialize during Mr. Rabinowitz's lifetime, or mine. Yet history has a way of surprising us with the speed at which unforeseen changes can occur, as witness the rapidity with which the Soviet Union collapsed. Many of us expected this to happen eventually, but no one thought it would happen so quickly. It is not beyond the realm of human possibility that something similar will take place in the Arab/Muslim world—not that I would quarrel with Mr. Rabinowitz when he in effect advises me not to hold my breath.

Along with Allen H. Holt, I think it would be a good thing, and in more ways than one, for Israel to lessen its dependence on the United States, and I applaud Benjamin Netanyahu's stated determination to achieve this goal.

But to end on a more appropriately somber note, I could not agree more with Herb Greer's analogy between the illusions of the non-Jewish appeasers and the Jewish deniers in the 30's on the one hand, and those of the "peace movement" both in Israel and throughout the West today on the other. Those illusions opened the way to what Winston Churchill called an "unnecessary war" then, and I fear that they will perform the same grisly service in the Middle East today. It is a source of unending wonder to me that even people old enough to remember the events that led up to World War II, or well-enough educated to be familiar with them, can go on blindly rushing toward disaster and pulling others along with them who may not be aware that this same type of minefield, cunningly disguised as the Garden of Eden, has been recklessly entered before only to blow up in everyone's face. I take it that this is what Naomi W. Cohen has in mind when she recommends that my article "should be required reading for all American Jews and Israelis"; for which I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

The Death Penalty

TO THE EDITOR:

Many thanks to David Gelernter for his cogent and eloquent essay on the death penalty, "What Do Murderers Deserve?" [April], and his reply to his critics [Letters from Readers, July]. Mr. Gelernter has managed both to capture the values that undergird capital punishment and to identify the societal character flaw that prevents its effective enforcement. As a full-time capital litigator, I would like to offer my practical experiences to confirm Mr. Gelernter's views.

When I was assigned as the lead prosecutor on the appeal of the first death sentences imposed in Connecticut in 30 years, I was somewhat conflicted about my role in the process. It was humbling to realize that if my intellectual efforts were successful and my arguments persuasive, the case would end with the death of another human being. Early in my research, however, I was fortunate to discover that Connecticut's original capital-sentencing scheme, dating back to the 1600's, was derived directly from the Torah. Indeed, the statutory sections delineating death as a punishment for murder cite Deuteronomy and Exodus as authority for their enactment

There are many deep, philosophical discussions about the death penalty that can inform today's debates, but the real cause of the moral bankruptcy Mr. Gelernter identifies starts with the basics. Society's unwillingness to pass moral judgment when it is appropriate begins with its inability or unwillingness to translate correctly the Sixth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill." Anyone who makes even the slightest effort to understand the text knows that the Torah does not forbid killing another human being; rather, it enjoins the crime of "murder." There are many forms of justifiable homicide, including just wars, self-defense, and, in a morally courageous society, executing those guilty of our most egregious crimes. The Torah not only prescribes capital punishment for the murderer, but uses a turn of phrase unique to all capital crimes listed in the Bible. We are commanded to "murder the murderer."

Whenever I say this during a lecture or debate, a death-penalty opponent reminds me that under Jewish law, *halakhah*, it is incredibly difficult to execute someone. But these people ignore the fact that at the time of the Torah, murder itself was very rare. Yet despite the paucity of murders, the Torah also states that when society convicts someone of murder it cannot "turn away [its] eyes," but must impose the sentence required by law. The 11th-century commentator Rashi explains this clause as a warning that one cannot act in a cowardly manner by transforming the victimizer into a victim. According to Rashi, it is morally inexcusable for society to say: "One citizen is already dead, why should we take the life of another?"

As one barometer of today's moral standards, let me cite the United States Supreme Court ruling that the death penalty can only be imposed on murderers. In its rulings since the 1976 decision in *Gregg* v. *Georgia*, the Court has created an often confusing and contradictory set of procedural guidelines, on the one hand designed to ensure that only those who most deserve such punishment are sentenced to death while, on the other, permitting sentencers to "turn away their eyes" if they encounter the slightest mitigating evidence.

The reader should not

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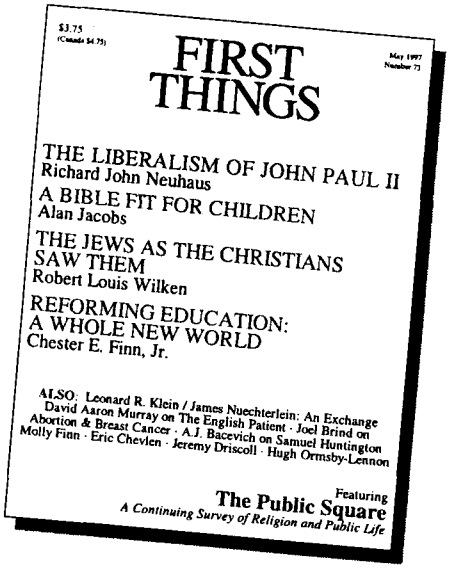
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think, however, that society's moral dilemma is always reflected in the complexities of capital jurisprudence. Even at the most basic levels, prosecutors are constantly reminded of society's fickleness. For example, capital defendants who brutalize, terrorize, and torture their victims prior to killing them stand before the court and argue that their crime was not heinous, cruel, or depraved as defined by the courts. These same defendants then have the audacity to argue that an injection of a combination of drugs that causes them ostensibly to die peacefully and painlessly in their sleep is a cruel method of execution. Although we may not be surprised that condemned inmates make this argument, we should be outraged when courts do anything more than summarily reject such drivel.

To me, the most insulting claim, but one not yet rejected by our courts, is that the death penalty is unconstitutional because more people are executed for killing white victims than for killing black victims. This is not an argument that systemic bias is reflected in the number of black defendants on death row. Everyone agrees that a defendant should not be sentenced to death because of his race, and reliable data show that this does not occur. Therefore, the capital-defense bar has to create another issue that focuses on the race of the victim. The essence of this claim is that the death penalty is administered in a manner indicating that the life of a white murder victim is allegedly more valuable than the life of a black murder victim. Forget for a moment that most homicides are intraracial and that, of the interracial murders, only a small percentage involves whites killing blacks, and consider the consequence of accepting this premise. Murderers could be spared their just punishment by asserting the rights of the very people they victimized. How absurd!

Indeed, one defendant argued, as a mitigating factor, that he killed his white victim because of uncontrollable black rage against white society and white women in particular. Thus, he admitted that his crime was racially motivated. On appeal of his death sentence, he now claims that he cannot be executed because he is black, his victim is white, and the system has a built-in bias against blacks who murder whites. In today's bizarre world of capital litigation, this is a litigable claim.

In sum, Mr. Gelernter's article encapsulates philosophically what I see routinely in the courtrooms I visit and the cases I read. This moral dilemma, however, comes with a price. It breeds disrespect and cynicism for the law and its institutions, and blurs what should be the one immutable and universally shared moral belief—that the crime of murder is a blot on society.

Today, with children killing children on school playgrounds, we are beginning to reap what we have sown. Thank you, Mr. Gelernter, for so precisely identifying the malady that contributes to this carnage and for reminding me why it is my job to try to swim against this formidable tide of indecision.

HARRY WELLER
Senior Assistant State's Attorney
State of Connecticut
Hartford, Connecticut

DAVID GELERNTER writes:

Harry Weller reminds us how nice it would be if we heard from more prosecutors and fewer professors.

Patrick J. Buchanan

TO THE EDITOR:

Arch Puddington's review of Patrick J. Buchanan's *The Great Betrayal* [Books in Review, May] was a breath of fresh air, a welcome respite from the muddled responses of the media and the GOP that, just as they did in 1992 and 1996, refuse to take Buchanan seriously until he disrupts the GOP primaries and makes it that much easier for the Democrats to retain control of the White House.

Of course Buchanan is going to run again in 2000; he said as much recently to the Associated Press, claiming that, by cobbling together a mélange of right-to-lifers, gun fanciers, economic nationalists, disgruntled Perotistas, and disaffected blue-collar Democrats, he can win the GOP nomination and the presidency. Buchanan's electoral mathematics are flawed, naturally (as are his economic and historical arguments in *Betrayal*), but, as was demonstrated before, he does not need a huge support base to cause a lot of trouble for conservatives and Republicans. What his so-called "Buchanan Brigades" lack in numbers they make up for in sheer passion, commitment, and tenacity.

To my mind, the most troubling aspect of Buchanan's ideology is his reflexive paranoia centered around money and finance; is this thinly-veiled anti-Semitism or just good old-fashioned class warfare? Buchanan got hammered with his incendiary statements about Israel and the Jewish community several years ago; is he now merely recasting these odious thoughts, flying under the radar of those who monitor such behavior?

Sensible Republicans are going to have to confront Pitchfork Pat head-on and, in the words of Irwin M. Stelzer of the American Enterprise Institute, argue him down. Buchanan's divisive politics and ruinously costly economics are bad for the conservative movement, bad for the GOP, and bad for the country.

DANIEL K. WEIR
Arlington, Virginia

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Controversy

Holocaust Studies

Gabriel Schoenfeld & Critics

Joan Ringelheim:

In "Auschwitz and the Professors" [June], Gabriel Schoenfeld distorts my words, takes quotations out of context, and puts them into interpretations that bear no relationship to my ideas. All in all, his article is a malicious and reckless attack on my work and on the work of other scholars. To imply that I "assign co-responsibility for the catastrophe [of the Holocaust]" to Jewish men and Nazis is a claim so vile as not to warrant a reply. No one who has conscientiously read my work or heard me speak could arrive at such an outrageous conclusion.

Mr. Schoenfeld demonstrates ignorance about the study of the Holocaust as well as ignorance about the development of the study of women and gender. It is important to note that Holocaust scholarship has evolved to take into account the different experiences of children and adults, rich and poor, religious and secular, as well as women and men. Together with age and class, sex and gender are universal categories—being in one category or another always has consequences. As I point out in my article, "The Split Between Gender and the Holocaust," in the collection edited by Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*:

> Jewish women and men experienced unrelieved suffering during the Holocaust, but Jewish women carried the burdens of sexual victimization, pregnancy, abortion, childbirth, killing of newborn babies in the camps to save the mothers, care of children, and many decisions about separation from children. For Jewish women, the Holocaust produced a set of experiences, responses, and memories that do not always parallel those of men. As Pauline [a survivor] said, "Everything else is the same. But there are certain things that are different." If in the gas chambers or before the firing squads all Jews seemed alike to the Nazis, the path to this end was not always the same for women and men.

The study of women in the Holocaust is a legitimate and important field of research; the feminists who study and write about women during the Holocaust are serious and committed. To serve his own political agenda, Mr. Schoenfeld attacks the legitimacy of the field, and, in the process, trivializes the human experience of victims in the Holocaust.

U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum
Washington, D.C.

Michael Berenbaum:

As a former director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's research institute, permit me to comment on Gabriel Schoenfeld's disturbing article, "Auschwitz and the Professors."

The Holocaust is taught in many universities, colleges, and community colleges, even secondary and intermediate schools throughout the United States. I do not know how many of these classrooms Mr. Schoenfeld has visited, but I have visited many on each level and I have attended conferences on the Holocaust for teachers and scholars throughout the world. The Holocaust is taught with fear and trembling, with reverence for the subject and respect for its victims almost everywhere I have been.

My colleagues do not undertake

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their teaching lightly. The "unhappy effect of naturalizing the horror" that Robert Alter warned of two decades ago in connection with academic studies of the Holocaust has not occurred. Indeed, the magnitude of the horror makes its naturalization impossible.

I suspect that Mr. Schoenfeld knows that Harvard's failure to appoint a professor to the chair of Holocaust studies had nothing to do with the academic excellence of the candidates and everything to do with the ideological composition of the search committee and the academic politics of the Cambridge campus. And COMMENTARY readers should have been so informed.

In fact, Harvard never seriously interviewed one of the best candidates for the chair. Its final offer to have the Holocaust scholar Saul Friedländer deliver some lectures hardly fit the definition of an endowed chair and was properly rejected.

I did not know that Debórah Dwork was a feminist scholar until I read Mr. Schoenfeld's article. I did know that her two books on the Holocaust were precisely that, books on the Holocaust. *Children With a Star* was published by Yale University Press and was well reviewed in the professional literature, hardly the marks of an academic slouch. And *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*, which she co-authored with Robert Jan van Pelt, is an original and excellent study of the largest of the Nazi death camps. I did not detect then and cannot detect now any feminist overtones in this work. I did detect then and do detect now excellent scholarship, the mark of true professionals.

We must be reading different books or reading the same books quite differently. Mr. Schoenfeld seems to catalogue the sins of some feminist scholars with a blatantly ideological agenda. I believe that the essays in the Ofer-Weitzman volume, *Women in the Holocaust*, demonstrate that a study of gender can offer some insights into the unique experience of women in the Holocaust, but I also believe that gender mattered little in comparison to one's Jewish identity. Some essays in the book are better than others, some more informative, some more radical, and some quite balanced. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman invited both ardent feminists and those who felt that such perspectives were essentially irrelevant to the study of the Holocaust. In their book, all viewpoints were represented—I think quite fairly.

I sense that Mr. Schoenfeld is quite harsh on my former colleague, Joan Ringelheim. She is a feminist scholar, true enough, and proudly so. But she is employed at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum as director of education because, among her other fine qualities, she is known to be a fine teacher and an excellent manager of educational projects. I worked with her when she directed the Museum's oral-history department and in the planning of the Museum's permanent exhibitions.

Although there were many levels of checks and balances in the process of vetting the content of the Museum's exhibitions, Joan Ringelheim deserves a significant share of credit for the accuracy and balance of the presentation. But her views on women and the Holocaust did not prevail in the creation of the Museum: witness the critique of the Museum offered by *Ms.* magazine and Joan Ringelheim's own critique of the Museum's permanent exhibition.

But whether one agrees with her views or not, one must concede that without Joan Ringelheim's work, the issue of women's experience itself would not have been raised and the general consensus of the field would not have emerged.

I believe that Mr. Schoenfeld lacks faith in the integrity of the academic study of the Holocaust that has respect for its craft, fear and trembling for the event it studies, and a sensitivity for its victims.

While berating the ideological disfigurement of the Holocaust, how is it that Mr. Schoenfeld omits all mention of the ideologies of the Right that led to the debacle at Harvard? Would it be fair to ask if he might have an ideological agenda masked behind his views?

Los Angeles, California

DALIA OFER AND
LENORE J. WEITZMAN:

Gabriel Schoenfeld has grossly distorted the serious scholarship in our book, *Women in the Holocaust*. If scholars do not study the Holocaust, it will be forgotten. And if scholars do not pay attention to the unique testimonies of women survivors, they will be forgotten—or their experiences will be assumed to have been identical to those of men. But they were not.

It is important to emphasize that we are not asserting that women's experiences during the Holocaust were totally different from those of men. That would be as false and misleading as to argue that their experiences were identical to those of men. Of course the Nazis were trying to kill all Jews. But there were many instances where survivors' experiences were influenced by their gender, and it is only by understanding the experiences that were unique to women—as well as those that were relevant to all Jews—that we can provide a complete account of what happened.

In the introduction to *Women in the Holocaust* we point to four systematic sources of gender differences during the Holocaust. The first was the prewar roles of Jewish men and women. Both men and women underwent profound crises, but for opposite reasons: men lost their work and with it both their economic security and their status; women, by contrast, had to cope with a new and growing burden of domestic work.

A second source of differences

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arose from the fact that Jews believed, at least in the beginning, that the Nazis were "civilized" and would not harm women and children. As a result, most Jewish families gave priority to husbands, sons, and fathers in formulating their plans for migration, hiding, and escape, while women and children remained at home; but they were not safe there, and often became the victims of sweeping arrests.

A third set of structural differences was imposed by Nazi edicts dictating different regulations, work requirements, and sanctions. The most notorious such policy was the targeting of pregnant women for immediate death in the concentration camps.

Finally, men and women reacted differently to their progressive victimization—from their initial responses to danger in the early years of the war; to the new roles that women assumed during the ghetto period when men faced greater dangers; to their different experiences in hiding, passing, and in the Jewish underground; to their different coping mechanisms in the concentration camps. For each of these subjects there is a detailed historical analysis in our book.

The portraits of women in our book show us their individuality, strength, and humanity—and deepen our understanding of the Holocaust. For Gabriel Schoenfeld to characterize this serious scholarship as "feminist consciousness-raising" is both false and misleading.

Hebrew University, Jerusalem

George Mason University
Fairfax, Virginia

NECHAMA TEC:

As a Holocaust scholar and survivor who has devoted more than twenty years to the research and teaching of the subject, I read Gabriel Schoenfeld's article with interest. I agree with him that both academic research and teaching of the Holocaust are not consistently of the highest quality, and I would welcome improvements. That is precisely why I fully support Debórah Dwork's statement that it is "appalling" that Harvard failed to establish a program in Holocaust studies, and am delighted that the Center for Holocaust Studies she heads at Clark University has been gaining in recognition.

I wish Mr. Schoenfeld had been aware of Debórah Dwork's scholarship, covering a wide range of publications, including works on children and Auschwitz. I would also like to inform Mr. Schoenfeld that her participation in the negotiations with the Polish government was motivated by a strong desire to protect the historical sites of both Auschwitz and Birkenau from commercial encroachments and abuses. I am familiar with her program at Clark University and feel that a visit to it might have changed Mr. Schoenfeld's opinion.

Finally, I want to emphasize that I am honored to have my article included in the excellent book edited by Dalia Ofer and Leonore J. Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*. Perhaps Mr. Schoenfeld could refrain from placing all research about women into the same category.

In view of his almost wholesale condemnation, I wonder whom Gabriel Schoenfeld would appoint as appropriate guardians of this field. Does he have in mind journalists? Perhaps people with strong political agendas?

University of Connecticut
Stamford, Connecticut

ROBERT JAN VAN PELT:

Reading Gabriel Schoenfeld's misogynist rant against some of the recent developments in Holocaust research and education, I found it simply offensive to see the work of a group of women scholars reduced to the benighted emanations of a witches' sabbath. Mr. Schoenfeld found at least some magnanimity when discussing the work of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen and Steven T. Katz, whom he characterized as "serious scholars." But his good will obviously ran out when discussing the scholarship of women.

It is, for example, easy to mock Debórah Dwork's attempt to raise the possibility of a "gendered analysis" of the Auschwitz death camp after two-and-a-half pages of selective, decontextualized quotations from conference proceedings. It would have been more worthwhile to mention that her work on Jewish children during the Holocaust is recognized by all in the field as truly path-breaking.

As Debórah Dwork's co-author of a standard work on the Auschwitz death camp (*Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present*, winner of the National Jewish Book Award and the Spiro Kostof Award), I contend that she should be given more respect when she addresses the position of women in Auschwitz, struggles with very real questions concerning the future of the Auschwitz memorial site, or succeeds in establishing an extraordinary center of graduate study of the Holocaust at Clark University. But in his article Mr. Schoenfeld denied Debórah Dwork and her female colleagues the benefit of the doubt given to male scholars.

What remained was pure caricature.

University of Waterloo
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

SIDNEY BOLKOSKY:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's article might have posed some significant questions for the study of the Holocaust. Unfortunately, his annoying, very selective use of "evidence" to make his case ignores any substantive or informed analysis.

What Mr. Schoenfeld fails to do is cite the best of the Holocaust scholars and writers, including Debórah Dwork, whose work is meticulously documented and carefully sensitive to the issues of popularization and clichés. Where are Lawrence Langer, Geoffrey Hartman, and Raul Hilberg in his article? Where are Christopher Browning

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(he manages to slip in Daniel Jonah Goldhagen) and Martin Gilbert? Does Mr. Schoenfeld mean to suggest that Saul Friedländer, among the most respected and thorough scholars in the field, is "simply spreading jargon, ideology, and distortions both monstrous and trivial"? Where, too, are the works and words of Primo Levi, and even Yehuda Bauer, who obviously does not now cling to his earlier warnings against "Holocaustology"? I suspect that Mr. Schoenfeld is a random consumer of Holocaust books; his article offers not the slightest clue that he is an informed one.

Mr. Schoenfeld has chosen some of the most egregious examples of misappropriation of the Holocaust. Each of us involved with Holocaust studies worries interminably about such travesties. When Alvin H. Rosenfeld wrote his article "The Americanization of the Holocaust" [COMMENTARY, June 1995], he, too, selected some of the most blatantly offensive and ridiculous examples of academic and nonacademic tripe.

Yet here is a classic case of wanting to throw the baby out with the bathwater: the answer to such abuses of common sense, sensitivity, and good academic research is not the abandonment of the project. It is, rather, to keep such caveats as we can draw from them constantly in focus and to speak and write as honestly and clearly as possible.

Mr. Schoenfeld attacks Joan Ringelheim but does not disclose her very important contribution to oral history in her essay, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*. The essay suggests directions for oral histories to proceed, broadening the questions and probing more deeply into some of the possible differences between the experiences of men and women during the Holocaust.

There is no point in arguing the case for Holocaust studies. It has become a respectable part of history and literature curricula, taught in interdisciplinary ways, with caution and constant awareness of the pitfalls that loom at every step of the way.

University of Michigan
Dearborn, Michigan

RONDALL R. RICE:

Gabriel Schoenfeld seriously distorts the structure and teaching style of the course on the Holocaust given at the United States Air Force Academy, and misrepresents the manner in which the Academy prepares America's future officers and leaders.

Although not so noted, his information came from "The Holocaust Course at the United States Air Force Academy," an article by a former history instructor, Major Edward Westermann (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November 1996). Mr. Schoenfeld's quotations are taken out of context and are wholly inappropriate, especially his assertion that the Academy's course "rates first among its eighteen history-department offerings." Westermann clearly noted that out of the eighteen history offerings, the Holocaust course rated second in cadet critiques—specifically, in how the students liked it and how it challenged them intellectually. Mr. Schoenfeld also clearly represents what he calls the course's "role-playing exercises" as being trivial, and he seems to allude to them as enjoyable activities.

The role-playing exercises were written (not cadets acting out roles). The cadets were asked to write four essays, each representing a dilemma faced by different perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. (I might also note that history courses nationwide use such written exercises.) In one of them, perhaps the most important exercise for officers-in-training, cadets tackled the ethical decisions faced by German reserve police battalions in Poland in 1942. In another, they were required to confront the debate over the bombing of Auschwitz by placing themselves in the U.S. State Department in 1942; this debate is especially timely in an era when air power has been used to stem ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, Africa, and the Middle East.

Not only does Mr. Schoenfeld take Westermann's quotes grossly out of context, he relies on an article that covered the 1993 course offering. As course chair for this past semester's offering, I did not have the cadets write essays from a first-person historical perspective. However, we continued to engage them in discussions analyzing the decision-making and situational pressures faced by the *Judenrat* (the ghetto Jewish council) and the men of Reserve Police Battalion 101, among others. These lessons were integrated into philosophical discussions of "war, morality, and the military profession" and the ethics of following orders.

Captain, USAF
United States Air Force Academy
Colorado

MYRNA GOLDENBERG:

Contrary to what Gabriel Schoenfeld says about my work, I have repeatedly and unambiguously stated that women's behavior in Auschwitz and other camps reflected gender-specific, family-oriented habits—habits they learned prior to the Nazi era in their roles as women whose primary responsibilities centered on homemaking and nurturing.

In "Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women's Holocaust Narratives" (*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November 1996), I wrote that "friendships, bonding, nurturance, and other permutations of caring can hardly be said to be genetic and exclusive characteristics of women." In the Ofer-Weitzman anthology, I stated again that "such bonding was not exclusive to women, but [that] it is difficult to find consistent evidence [from memoirs] of men's caring to the extent that women did."

Elsewhere, I have argued that

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women and men experienced "different horrors within the same Hell" and that these differences were often a function of the fact that women were vulnerable to the Nazis in ways specific and exclusive to women. In a review-essay, "From a World Beyond: Women in the Holocaust," I explained that "while Nazi *policy* in regard to the destruction of its enemies was not gender specific, Nazi *practice* was" (*Feminist Studies*, Fall 1996). Nowhere in my work have I "joyfully announc[ed]" anything about the barracks in Auschwitz. Nor have I ever suggested that I "coded" Holocaust memoirs. Indeed, I leave that methodology to sociologists and other social scientists; I am in literature as well as women's studies.

Most scholarship about the Holocaust reflects sincere and successful attempts to respect the victims and survivors as individual people, not "variables, case studies, or gendered objects," as Mr. Schoenfeld falsely accuses. He ought to hold himself to the same standards of reason and integrity that he requires of academics, feminist or otherwise.

Montgomery College
Rockville, Maryland

STEPHEN FEINSTEIN:

There is no doubt that Holocaust studies, or "Holocaustology" as Gabriel Schoenfeld would have it, has become institutionalized in many American universities. Undoubtedly, the rush to establish the field has revealed many problems, even some issues that border on kitsch. An undergraduate major in Holocaust studies seems to be rather obsessive, and I believe most academics would still cast their vote for a traditional major, with perhaps a course and independent study about the Holocaust as the curriculum warranted it. As acting director of the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota, let me note here that our Center does not have an endowed chair and students cannot major or even minor in its courses.

Mr. Schoenfeld's cynical approach to the Yale program in Genocide Studies suggests the naiveté of many who maintain the uniqueness of Jewish destruction without understanding other real genocides: Native American, Armenian, Roma-Sinti, and contemporary slaughters in Bosnia and Rwanda. To be sure, discourse about AIDS, battered women, and African-American slavery in the same breath as the Holocaust is a distortion.

At bottom is the political issue of how the Holocaust affects the Israeli sense of memory and the peacemaking process. John K. Roth's nomination to direct the Holocaust Museum's research institute raised the question of whether Israelis can behave like perpetrators of the past. Sadly, Roth made the mistake of telling the truth, which may have served to disqualify him from a position in which he would have had to ask hard and difficult questions, not to affirm the obvious.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Schoenfeld's article has already been distributed widely in Europe by Holocaust-deniers as evidence that supports their own demented claims.

University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, Minnesota

WE, AS TEACHERS, SCHOLARS, and researchers, reject Gabriel Schoenfeld's thesis in his article, "Auschwitz and the Professors," and affirm that serious scholarship on the Holocaust within the university is both appropriate and necessary. Indeed, the vast body of knowledge that is the result of scholarship on the Holocaust has increased national and international awareness and understanding of this seminal event in the history of the world. Study of the Holocaust, especially in institutions of higher learning, is characterized much more by responsible scholarship than by ideological or self-serving approaches. Like other moral persons, we do not accept the exploitation and trivialization of the Holocaust in any sense. We, therefore, deplore Mr. Schoenfeld's malicious and unfounded attack on the academic pursuit of the Holocaust.

BARBARA KELLERMAN
Center for the Advanced Study of Leadership
University of Maryland

HENRY GREENSPAN
University of Michigan

STEPHEN FEINSTEIN
Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies
University of Minnesota

MYRNA GOLDENBERG
Montgomery College, Maryland

[This letter was also signed by 25 other individuals.—ED.]

JOHN K. ROTH:

The Holocaust, an unprecedented and catastrophically unique event, should provoke fear and worry. Its awesome magnitude ought to make us shudder. Unfortunately, Gabriel Schoenfeld's attack on Holocaust research and pedagogy detracts from those moral concerns. It does so by casting unwarranted suspicion on scholars, teachers, and institutions whose work, in fact, supports sound understanding of Holocaust history and appreciation of that event's implications for the present and the future.

As a scholar who has been deeply involved in teaching, research, and writing about the Holocaust for more than a quarter of a century, I know that some pedagogy and scholarship are better than others. Nevertheless, the picture painted by Mr. Schoenfeld makes Holocaust studies scarcely recognizable to me. After more than 30 years in academic life, I can honestly say that the scholars and teachers I know—the number is large and representative of the field—are passionately dedicated to historical accuracy, significant teaching, and responsible writing. More specifically, and owing to the solemn nature of the event itself, Holocaust scholars and teachers

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typically reject jargon, shun ideology, and attempt to avoid distortions and facile comparisons. Scholars and teachers in the field separate the wheat from the chaff much better than Mr. Schoenfeld implies.

One can share Mr. Schoenfeld's concerns about standards, but there will not be much worthwhile teaching and scholarship—and in the long run not much vital memory of the Holocaust—unless schools, colleges, universities, endowed chairs, research centers, museums, publishers, and other educational institutions provide encouragement and support for the important work that lies ahead. This work must concentrate on the particularity of the Holocaust, for the evil—and the good—exists in the details. Therefore, study about what happened to women is legitimate and necessary.

Some years ago, the students in my own Holocaust courses (in which women are often the majority) drove home this point for me by asking questions about women during the Holocaust years. Not knowing how to answer them, I did my homework. One result was *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, a volume I edited with Carol Rittner. Although Mr. Schoenfeld mentions this book, there is no evidence that he studied it with any care. Drawing on survivor testimony and the insightful reflections of Joan Ringelheim and other responsible, pioneering scholars, *Different Voices* takes a position that is representative of most teaching and scholarship about women in the Holocaust.

Again, one can share Mr. Schoenfeld's concern that study about women in the Holocaust must meet the highest standards, but his anxious essay reads too much like a wholesale condemnation of scholars who are doing key work in an area that is basic, serious, and still lacking the regard it deserves. The good news is that current teaching and scholarship about the Holocaust, including the work about women, meet the standards Mr. Schoenfeld sets. The bad news is that his article twists and obscures that fact. It does more harm than good.

Claremont McKenna College
Claremont, California

STEVEN BAYME:

In an otherwise stimulating and important essay, Gabriel Schoenfeld unfortunately slights the magisterial scholarship of Steven T. Katz. By tarring him with the same brush as those who subject the Holocaust to "victim studies" and "gendered analysis," Mr. Schoenfeld blurs Katz's true contribution. In *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, Katz trenchantly and thoroughly investigates the other genocides of history and, on the basis of these comparisons, concludes that the Holocaust was unique: never before had one nation embarked upon an ideological program to eliminate another.

To be sure, as Mr. Schoenfeld notes, Katz's use of obscure mathematical formulas often intrudes upon his writing. Yet at a time when relativizing the Holocaust by insisting it was but one atrocity in a long chain of others has surpassed Holocaust-denial as the major threat to understanding, I find myself eagerly anticipating the appearance of future volumes in Katz's project.

Bronx, New York

NORMAN ADLER:

Gabriel Schoenfeld has pointed out some of the ways that academics can obscure the subjects they are supposed to elucidate. As such, his piece is more succinct and more amusing than many other essays—and volumes—deconstructing the modern university. Still, in his denunciation of Holocaust studies and its attendant chairs, symposia, museums, and modes of analysis, Mr. Schoenfeld does not center on one fundamental question: *should* there be chairs of Holocaust studies?

Mr. Schoenfeld is not enamored of the social-scientific approach. "The very language in which the murder of six million Jews is discussed," he complains, is "in no way distinguishable from the language of agricultural macroeconomics or the sociology of chimpanzees." OK—he does not enjoy reading jargon. But that in itself does not rule out Holocaust studies any more than it rules out macroeconomics or inquiry into animal behavior. Similarly with multiculturalism, gender studies, and touchy-feely victim studies. To condemn Holocaust studies as a whole because some scholars play in this area misses the mark.

Mr. Schoenfeld quotes Robert Alter: "A topic or event, however momentous, is not an academic discipline." On the contrary, it seems to me there is often good reason for making a "topic or event" into a discipline. The Renaissance, American studies, the Bible—all topics, all momentous, all good disciplines. He also cites the "sense-deadening phenomenon" of what Alter referred to as "naturalizing the horror." I agree this is a problem; but it is also the challenge.

My university has just appointed its first permanent chair in Holocaust studies. Joshua Zimmerman, the incumbent, is an articulate historian of Eastern Europe who will relate this "momentous event" in all its intricacy to our students: the intellectual, spiritual, and occasionally biological heirs of so many destroyed in the event. As part of the academic process, it is the job of professors like Zimmerman to examine and analyze events—and to explain them to the rest of us. The same argument against "naturalizing" the horror of the Holocaust could be and has been made against studying the Bible, the Talmud, or medieval Jewish thought with the tools of modern analysis. Would Mr. Schoenfeld really accept the consequences of this general line of reasoning?

Dean, Yeshiva College
New York City

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WILLIAM F. S. MILES:

"Auschwitz and the Professors" appeared at a rather propitious moment for me, just as I was being offered my own university's Holocaust chair. For reasons that echo Mr. Schoenfeld's own arguments, I hesitated before accepting. It *is* truly unseemly to profit, professionally and otherwise, from the Holocaust. Rather than declining such an appointment out of principle, however, is it not preferable to proceed with it as best, and as respectfully, as one can? I am, at any rate, beholden to Mr. Schoenfeld for pointing out the pitfalls (and minefields) that endanger the field of "Holocaustology."

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts

EDWARD ALEXANDER:

Gabriel Schoenfeld recommends that "scholars who still study and teach about the Holocaust in a serious way" take up arms against the "genderologists" and other propagandists who have battened upon the murdered Jews of Europe. But this is easier said than done, for some of the physicians Mr. Schoenfeld would summon are themselves in need of healing.

It was, for example, not only the egregious Debórah Dwork who thought that inviting Yasir Arafat to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum was a wonderful idea and derided the move to cancel that invitation as "morally unconscionable." The eminently serious and respectable Deborah Lipstadt, who teaches the history of the Holocaust at Emory University, argued, in January of this year, that the museum would become "a superfluous institution" if it did not "educate" people like Arafat, and urged that one of this century's major war criminals be welcomed at the museum "with all courtesy and respect."

More recently, both Raul Hilberg and Christopher Browning, whose books represent the condition to which Holocaust scholarship should aspire, allowed their resentment of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's scanting of their work to provoke them to a deed far more shameful than the academic jargon that Mr. Schoenfeld objects to in Goldhagen's work. They endorsed Norman Finkelstein's vitriolic attack on Goldhagen as a Zionist agent. Finkelstein's febrile lucubrations on Israel are on the level of Noam Chomsky's, whose professed acolyte he is. And Finkelstein's essay is one part of a book—*A Nation on Trial*—that is completed by another onslaught against Goldhagen by Ruth Bettina Birn, who must also be reckoned a "serious" Holocaust scholar since she is chief historian for war-crimes investigations in Canada.

Holocaust scholarship is in much deeper trouble than Gabriel Schoenfeld suggests.

Seattle, Washington

GILBERT BORMAN:

Why should Holocaust studies be immune from the diseases that afflict the rest of academia? While one must writhe in agony at Gabriel Schoenfeld's examples, one can hardly claim surprise that political correctness has spread to this particular field. "He who controls the present controls the past. He who controls the past controls the future," wrote George Orwell. Why would Holocaust history not be redrafted to fit ideology?

Personally, however, I am an optimist. The enormity of the state-sponsored mass murder of the European Jews by a modern nation-state cannot and will not be glossed over by simplistic "isms." It takes only one student to ask a radical feminist professor why so many women guards at the camps were fascist lesbians to destroy pathetic politically-correct intellectual constructs. They can teach whatever they want; facts and truth do not go away.

Southfield, Michigan

ERIC REISFELD:

I deem myself rather "expert" on the Holocaust, having lived through it in Vienna. There is a German expression, "*Schuppen fallen von den Augen*," that loosely translates as "veils fall from my eyes." Gabriel Schoenfeld's article, "Auschwitz and the Professors," was precisely that kind of revelation for me. I had been totally unaware that a veritable Holocaust industry had evolved among real and pseudo "academics" busily dissecting any possible—as well as a few truly impossible—aspects of that event.

Silver Spring, Maryland

HERMAN F. WOLF:

Holocaust survivors are not amused by brazen efforts, such as the ones Gabriel Schoenfeld describes in his article, on the part of many so-called "scholars" to graft their pet projects onto the study of the Holocaust, even when they are totally unrelated to it. Take the suggestion by a feminist scholar quoted by Mr. Schoenfeld that there is a connection between Nazi "sexism" and the "exploitation of Jewish women by Jewish men"—this is not only sheer nonsense but shows disrespect for Holocaust victims, alive or dead.

As for scholarship, the late historian Lucy S. Dawidowicz contributed valuable and important works. Currently, Daniel Jonah Goldhagen is attempting to explore what factors in prewar Germany led ordinary people to commit wanton murder without let-up for the duration of the Nazi period and then return to seeming normalcy afterward. This is a serious undertaking. But the chaff that now masquerades as Holocaust studies is unfit for human consumption.

Syracuse, New York

BARBARA LERNER:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's article on the vulgarization of the Holocaust by all those miserable little ism-pushers was like salve on a wound for many of us.

Chicago, Illinois

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YAACOV LOZOWICK:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's important article is written provocatively, and is meant to provoke. While one does not have to agree entirely with each and every statement, my overall impression is very positive. Mr. Schoenfeld has obviously done a lot of reading, perhaps more than have many of those he rebukes. The issues he raises are troubling, and, alas, very real.

The main point on which one might take exception is the article's Americanocentrism. Contrary to the impression one might gain from Mr. Schoenfeld, much of the important research on the Holocaust is being conducted not in the U.S., and not in English, but rather in Poland and in Germany, in Polish and in German. German and Polish scholars are dealing with issues of greater significance than are some of the Americans described in "Auschwitz and the Professors."

Director, Yad Vashem Archives
Jerusalem, Israel

HENRY DASKO:

Gabriel Schoenfeld's eloquent and, on occasion, hilarious "Auschwitz and the Professors" brought back vivid memories of my childhood and adolescence spent in postwar Poland. Substitute Marxist-Leninist gobbledygook for the Holocaust pseudo-science Mr. Schoenfeld cites, replace "feminist" with "working class," and you end up with a rather accurate description of the excesses of ideology-infused education as I knew it. View the world in "gender" categories, and it will not differ much from the vision of those who once looked at it through the lens of "class origin."

It would be wrong to suggest that there are similarities between the post-Stalinist institution I attended in Warsaw and modern American universities. There are not. There is, however, an indisputable lesson to be learned: when harnessed to a political agenda, scholarship ceases to be worthy of its name.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Gabriel Schoenfeld

BEFORE REPLYING to individual critics, I want to extend the useful parallel suggested by Henry Dasko between the perversions of contemporary "Holocaustology" and the Marxist-Leninist folderol he was force-fed in the Communist Poland of his youth.

In the 1980's, the decade during which I completed my doctorate in Soviet politics, a profound shift was under way in my field of specialization. An older generation of scholars, a number of them refugees from Communism and Nazism, was passing from the scene. Within the group of American-born specialists coming to the fore, many embraced fashionable new approaches to the study of the Soviet Union.

Some of these new scholars, acting out of frankly ideological motives, attempted to topple long-established verities by arguing, for example, that the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was not a *coup d'état* but a "popular" uprising, that the Stalin era was not a period of terror and mass death but one of great "upward mobility," or that the USSR under Brezhnev had evolved into something approximating a "pluralistic" society. Although at first these new doctrines made a great stir, a vigorous counterreaction soon set in as other scholars spoke out against the revisionists, argued with them in the professional journals, or refuted them in op-ed columns and opinion magazines. This struggle went on for a period of years, until (especially with the revelations that came out after the fall of the Soviet Union) the revisionists were forced either to back down or to adopt a sharply reduced profile.

In some respects, Holocaust studies has proceeded along a similar trajectory. As in the Soviet field, an older generation of giants is now passing from the stage. Lucy S. Dawidowicz died in 1990; Raul Hilberg and Leni Yahil are retired; Yehuda Bauer, Yisrael Gutman, and Saul Friedländer—all three of them with personal experience of Hitler's Europe—are approaching retirement age. At the same time, a largely American-born breed of neo-revisionist scholars has been gaining ground. But unlike in the field of Soviet studies, the work of this new generation has not been subjected to any sort of critical scrutiny or probing debate from within.

The case of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen is the single large exception, and it is an exception full of implications for the current discussion. By any honest reckoning, Goldhagen's scholarly sins are far less flagrant than the travesties I pointed to in "Auschwitz and the Professors"—and I say this as one who believes his work is seriously flawed. Why, then, has Goldhagen been flayed at every turn, while the egregious "genderologists"—to use Edward Alexander's term for the feminist scholars—are honored and defended to the last by their colleagues?

My guess is that Goldhagen is paying the price for having openly violated the profession's cardinal rule: do not speak ill of thy fellow Holocaustologian. In his best-selling *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, he issued sweeping criticisms of almost every scholar who ever wrote a word in the pre-Goldhagen era. Unfortunately, these criticisms were often wide of the mark, as well as sneering in tone, and this, when added to the mortal sin he committed by expressing criticism at all, amounted to a triple crime that earned Goldhagen the status of pariah.

Nevertheless, the fact that other scholars, no matter what act of gross indecency they commit, are never so much as censured, while Goldhagen has been cast into the wilderness, reveals the perilous self-protectiveness that has taken hold in the field. For when honest and capable scholars fail to police their own profession, they end by discrediting themselves.

With this in mind, I want to address those of my critics who hint

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darkly that I was writing out of an unspoken political agenda of my own. They need not hint; I can state my purpose plainly. In "Auschwitz and the Professors," I was hoping to set in motion the same kind of pendulum-effect whose action was so salutary in the field of Soviet studies. For if the stakes were high in that debate, revolving as it did around grave distortions of historical memory, they are scarcely less so here. Herman F. Wolf, himself a survivor of Nazi concentration camps, is right that what is being said these days goes beyond the disgraceful; the professors who are desecrating the memory of the fallen should be stopped in their tenure tracks.

Unfortunately, if the letters by the various "true professionals"—to use Michael Berenbaum's term of self-praise—are any indication, this campaign will require a long march and many skirmishes. Things in the insular world of Holocaust studies are even worse than I had supposed.

LET ME now turn to my critics, starting with Joan Ringelheim, who as director of education at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum holds one of the most significant positions in the field.

Joan Ringelheim charges that my article constitutes "a malicious and reckless attack on [her] work"; it supposedly "distorts [her] words, takes quotations out of context, and puts them into interpretations that bear no relationship to [her] ideas." She cites only one instance, however, and it is an example neither of distortion nor of recklessness. Here, for the record, are the words I quoted from her essay in the Ofer-Weitzman anthology *Women in the Holocaust* (1998), together with the sentences surrounding them:

> It has been difficult to confront the fact that Jewish women were victims as *Jewish women* [emphasis in original], not only because some Jewish men exploited Jewish women, but also because Jewish men could not protect women and children from the Nazis. In other words, it has been too difficult to contemplate the extent to which gender counted in the exploitation and murder of Jewish women, and the extent to which the sexism of Nazi ideology and the sexism of the Jewish community met in a tragic and involuntary alliance. Men could and did oppress women sexually, and women were aware of that possibility.

In context or out of context, the words mean what I said they meant.

One assertion by Joan Ringelheim I have no intention of attempting to rebut is that "the feminists who study and write about women during the Holocaust are serious and committed." Indeed, her own serious commitment to feminism is the most important fact about her. To judge by her footnotes, apart from what she draws from the standard English-language literature (she cites no European-language sources), many of her ideas appear to come from tracts like *Feminist Revolution* (1975), *Radical Feminism* (1973), *Subject Women* (1981), and studies like *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science* (1983), in addition to *Ms.* magazine.

Drinking deeply from this particular gourd, Joan Ringelheim proceeds to graft onto the Holocaust every modish cliché imaginable about male and female behavior, and then to "theorize" about what it all means for feminism. Nowhere is this exercise pursued more avidly than in "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," which appears in *Different Voices*, the collection edited by John K. Roth. My correspondent Sidney Bolkosky singles out this essay as a "very important contribution" to the field of oral history and reprimands me for failing to "disclose" its existence to readers. But what he omits to say is that, although it begins by recapitulating interviews with female Holocaust survivors and concludes by posing some questions for further research, and although it offers an appendix with statistics of male and female mortality in the Lodz ghetto, sandwiched between these two sections is a lengthy excursus, taking up fully one-third of the essay, that addresses a different set of concerns entirely. Here—*in context*—are a few characteristic passages:

> While women's consciousness, "herstory," culture, and so on became the standard by which to understand and judge the world, there was confusion about whether the quintessential woman—the most typical or representative woman—was to be a woman of the past or a new woman of the future. The confusion resolved itself in a psychoanalytic mode: the past is the future. Then struggles arose about which woman of the past would serve as the model. The result was that we did not emerge with a consciousness, let alone a politics, that produced genuine solidarity with all women, though we did advance different claims to superiority. Lesbian separatism may be the most important example politically and motherhood the most egregious expression of the kinds of chauvinism (even nationalism) that developed. . . .
>
> . . . Liberals say that their discourse includes everyone, and they mean that they are concerned about white Anglo-Saxon Protestants; cultural feminists say that they consider all women, but they refer only to lesbians, and/or mothers, and/or straight women, and/or S/M lesbians, and/or university women, and/or middle-class women, and/or women against pornography, and/or any number of others. While cultural feminists speak about a kind of universal woman, in fact they privilege some women over others. This imitation of, or connection to, liberalism is hazardous. . . .

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> Can we so blithely reclaim and make right what has caused so much oppression without some careful scrutiny of our motives and politics? Can Jews reclaim the language of "kike"; or lesbians, "dyke"; or blacks, "nigger" without retaining some of the negativity that infests and infects the oppressors' use of those words, let alone the institutions of which such language is only a part? . . .
>
> The valorization of oppression damages not only our politics but our research. We want to justify our valorization of such beliefs and practices so much that our critical faculties become quiescent when we discuss these questions. The claim of female superiority is not at issue so much as the nature of gender differences and the kind of woman who best exemplifies them. . . .
>
> The archaeological perspective that we have had on women's culture must be reexamined. Why do we take this point of view? How do we want to use it? Against what are we fighting? What new world are we making? Does our work sustain or even reinforce oppression? Are we articulating ways to understand and combat oppression? How does our work further the liberation of women? And if it does not, in what sense is it feminist?

And so on, and so forth, and so on and so forth.

Beneath the babble, there is actually a clear statement of an agenda here. That agenda is *not* the historical understanding of the Holocaust. It is, rather, the "liberation of women," as Joan Ringelheim conceives it. In this connection, what are we to make of the remark of Michael Berenbaum that "many levels of checks and balances" succeeded in keeping Joan Ringelheim's beliefs from having any tangible effect on the content of the Holocaust museum? Even her supervisors, it seems, are discomfited by what she represents.

FOR HIS part, Michael Berenbaum seems to think *Women in the Holocaust* by Ofer and Weitzman is praiseworthy because "all viewpoints were represented" in it, not only "ardent feminists" but those who disagree with them. But are we dealing here with scholarship or with a Democratic-party caucus? My criticisms of the Ofer-Weitzman book revolved not around the question of its representativeness but around the way it distorts and obscures understanding of the Holocaust, and I cited specific instances to show what I meant. It is wholly typical of the way "true professionals" conduct discussions these days that Mr. Berenbaum resolutely declines to enter into a discussion of those specifics, confining himself instead to generalities.

And to irrelevancies. Mr. Berenbaum chastises me for not discussing the battle fought at Harvard over the university's endowed Holocaust chair. Frankly, I do not know what he is driving at. The source of Harvard's difficulties is not a subject on which I had anything useful to add, never having discussed the matter with any of the committee's members and not knowing anything more about Harvard's confidential deliberations than what I had read in the *New York Times*. Evidently, Mr. Berenbaum knows quite a bit more, but even while he reproaches me for not clueing readers in, he refrains from telling us what it is. What is the name of the mystery scholar, for example, who, according to him, Harvard never interviewed? Was it he himself? Was it Debórah Dwork, who has said that Harvard came out of the affair "stinking like a fish"? Just when things get interesting, Mr. Berenbaum seals his lips.

In my article I noted Robert Alter's worry that making the Holocaust part of the curriculum would have "the unhappy effect of naturalizing the horror." Mr. Berenbaum assures us that is simply not so. In the countless classes he has visited at every educational level, the subject is taught with "fear and trembling"—a phrase he uses twice in his letter and incessantly in his scholarly work.

From what I have seen and read, I tend to doubt the accuracy of this picture. But even if Mr. Berenbaum is right, and teachers and professors are indeed quivering at their podiums, and students crying into their notes, is this not just the flip side of what Alter cautioned against, calling it, memorably, "the special *frisson* of vicariously experiencing the unspeakable, in all the material comfort and security of our American lives"? Despite Mr. Berenbaum's blithe assurances, the question of how to introduce the Holocaust into the curriculum remains unresolved.

ALONG WITH Michael Berenbaum, Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman decline to engage in an exchange of views, charging instead that I have "grossly distorted the serious scholarship" in their anthology. But their lengthy and basically unexceptionable lecture makes not the slightest effort to cite any of my alleged distortions or to address a single one of my objections to their book. A pattern of evasion is becoming evident here.

LIKE A number of even more indignant writers, Nechama Tec takes me to task for slighting the scholarship of Clark University's Debórah Dwork. In both her books, *Auschwitz: 1270 to the Present* (1996, coauthored with Robert Jan van Pelt) and *Children With a Star* (1991), Debórah Dwork does indeed make a genuine and original contribution, and I should have said so. But I was focusing on something else: namely, the tasteless boasting and narcissism of the handouts she has written for her center, and her own ready descent into the cant of gender studies. To that I would now add, as Edward Alexander has reminded us, her even more troubling intervention on behalf of Yasir Arafat. Is it really "morally unconscionable" to oppose an official invitation to the Holo-

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caust Museum of a man with the blood of so many Jewish children on his hands?

Like Debórah Dwork, Nechama Tec, too, is a scholar of standing; indeed, she is fully aware of the twaddle being written and taught by others. In a letter early this summer to the *Wall Street Journal*, she spoke out against "feminist zealots" and those "propelled by extreme feminist views" to interject "political agendas" into Holocaust studies. In the light of these invigorating words, it is all the more incomprehensible to me that she should now decline to utter a word of criticism beyond the modest admission that "both the academic research and teaching of the Holocaust are not consistently of the highest quality." This sentence deserves a Pulitzer Prize for understatement.

ROBERT JAN VAN PELT charges that I have written a "misogynist rant," reducing women scholars to the "benighted emanations of a witches' sabbath." Sidney Bolkosky, more reasonably, claims that, although he worries "interminably about . . . travesties" and about the "blatantly offensive and ridiculous examples of academic and nonacademic tripe," my own effort is vitiated by my "annoying" and "selective" use of evidence. Aside from the fact that I do in fact mention some of the scholars whom Mr. Bolkosky accuses me of ignoring, and that I single out for praise Saul Friedländer, whom I stand charged with maligning, my purpose—again—was not to smell the flowers but to call attention to the weeds. Like all my critics, Mr. van Pelt does not want to get mixed up in an actual discussion of these weeds. I have already indicated why I think that may be so. For his part, when it comes to some of the scholarship now sprouting, Mr. Bolkosky seems unable to distinguish between weeds and flowers at all.

THE SENSE of mission evinced by Captain Rondall R. Rice of the U.S. Air Force Academy is admirable, but I found his complaint rather curious, and his intensity even more so. The Holocaust course in question, he writes, was rated not first out of eighteen courses but second, and I was wrong, he says, in "seem[ing] to allude" to the course's role-playing exercises "as enjoyable activities." And yet, according to the article by Edward Westermann that Captain Rice and I are both drawing on, the facts accord precisely with what I wrote: "The course was judged *first* in evaluation methods in regard to knowledge, thinking, and *enjoyment* for all graded work" (emphasis added).

As for the role-playing exercises themselves, whether oral or written, they are ridiculous. To ask cadets to ponder the "ethical decisions" faced by members of Nazi "reserve police battalions" in Poland in 1942 is to make a comedy out of a tragedy. As Christopher Browning and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen have both shown, the moral life of those serving in these units did not exactly revolve around the daily drawing of Kantian distinctions. The "ethical" question wrestled with day in and day out was: should I just kill this Jew, or should I torture him first?

Of course, the wartime relationship between armed forces and civilians is an essential subject for military education, but there are better and worse ways to educate. I am glad to learn from Captain Rice that under his chairmanship the role-playing approach has been discontinued even as he persists in defending it.

DO I owe an apology to Myrna Goldenberg? I wrote that she "joyfully announced the discovery of 'feminist values'" in the barracks of Auschwitz. She denies having "joyfully" announced anything. I accept her qualification: it would have been more accurate to say simply that she discovered "feminist values" in the barracks of Auschwitz.

At any rate, both Myrna Goldenberg and the Israel-bashing Stephen Feinstein have each affixed their signatures to still another letter to COMMENTARY, joining with more than two dozen other Holocaustologians who "reject" my thesis and "affirm that serious scholarship on the Holocaust within the university is both appropriate and necessary." If these self-described "moral persons" had actually read my "malicious and unfounded attack on the academic pursuit of the Holocaust," they would have noticed that while I oppose the establishment of separate academic centers, and—wonder of wonders—stand against the teaching of nonsense, I am unequivocally in favor of serious research and teaching about the Holocaust in a university setting. In fact, I regard it as a crucial task and have never suggested otherwise. But the style of argumentation employed by the Group of 29—hortatory, self-righteous, vacant—is, alas, yet another signpost showing just where things stand. I hope this homely document will help persuade Norman Adler that, compelling as his questions are in theory, the creation of a separate discipline called "Holocaust studies" has already, in practice, unleashed a plague.

FINALLY, THERE is John K. Roth, whose missive was one of the first to arrive at COMMENTARY in response to "Auschwitz and the Professors." At the time, all I knew about Mr. Roth was that he was a Christian theologian at Claremont McKenna College in California who had edited one of the feminist collections (*Different Voices*) I had cited in my article. I was hardly aware that he was slated to assume a leading position as the director of research at the Holocaust Memorial Museum, and while I had studied the essays in *Different Voices*, I had not paid particularly close attention to Mr. Roth's own work.

As is well known, Mr. Roth has since become an object of heated controversy. Readers of the weekly *Forward* and, following it, national

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daily newspapers were treated to an op-ed Mr. Roth had contributed to the *Los Angeles Times* in 1988 in which he drew a direct comparison between what the Nazis had done to the Jews in the countrywide pogrom known as *Kristallnacht* a half-century earlier and what the Israelis, according to him, were now poised to do to Palestinians. "*Kristallnacht* happened," he wrote,

> because a political state decided to be rid of people unwanted within its borders. It seems increasingly clear that Israel would prefer to rid itself of Palestinians if it could do so. . . . As much as any other people today, they are being forced into a tragic part too much like the one played by the European Jews 50 years ago.

Though Mr. Roth assures us in his letter to COMMENTARY that Holocaust scholars "attempt to avoid distortions and facile comparisons," here was not merely a facile comparison, but an outrageous one. As the weeks went by, moreover, it emerged that Mr. Roth had a long habit of playing fast and loose with the Holocaust, abusing his status as an "expert" to draw all sorts of comparisons between Nazis and things that had nothing to do with Nazism. Here, for instance, were his words after Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980:

> I watched Jimmy Carter concede even before the California polls closed. In doing so, I could not help remembering how forty years ago economic turmoil had conspired with Nazi nationalism and militarism . . . to send the world reeling into catastrophe that virtually annihilated the Jews of Europe.

Statements like these suggested to many people that Mr. Roth might be unfit for the job he had been selected to perform, and a number of figures in public life called on him to step aside. So he finally did, though not before he had received an outpouring of support from his fellow Holocaustologians and not until after the museum's governing board had voted in mid-June, with only one lonely nay vote, to endorse his appointment.

In light of what has been revealed about Mr. Roth, his supporters, and the Holocaust museum itself in the course of this controversy, I am, needless to say, less than reassured by the flat and unsubstantiated assertion in his letter that "scholars and teachers in the field of Holocaust studies separate the wheat from the chaff much better than Mr. Schoenfeld implies." We have had quite a glimpse by now into the kind of separating the Holocaustologians engage in, and it gives more cause for alarm than ever about how the next generation will come to remember the murder of Europe's Jews.

I THANK everyone who has written, but especially Norman Adler, Edward Alexander, Steven Bayme, Gilbert Borman, Henry Dasko, Barbara Lerner, Yaacov Lozowick, William F. S. Miles, Eric Reisfeld, and Herman F. Wolf.

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Commentary
August 1998

Defining the Democrats Down

Daniel Casse

In *Behind the Oval Office*, his memoir recounting his days as President Clinton's chief political strategist, Dick Morris writes that during the 1996 presidential campaign, everything the Democratic candidate said was read regularly over the phone to a cross-section of voters; their responses would determine the shape of the next day's message. This, according to Morris, was the way Bill Clinton "conducted an extensive conversation with the public." As the operation expanded, so, too, did its influence over the President's campaign, until it was no longer possible to tell whether he was conversing with the public, or the public was directing him. At one point, Morris suggested that Clinton spend his entire summer hiking and camping: polling research had demonstrated that images of hiking and camping resonated with swing voters.

Morris left the Clinton campaign on the eve of the 1996 Democratic convention, embroiled in a sexual scandal that has since been dwarfed by his erstwhile employer's own escapades. Today, Morris's stinging observations about the current crisis in the Oval Office, appearing in a syndicated newspaper column, have made him *persona non grata* at the White House. At the same time, however, his deeply cynical approach to American politics has left an indelible mark on both the President and the Democratic party.

Morris's most famous contribution to Clinton's thinking was to teach him the art of "triangulation," an overly complex term for the process of justifying any position the would-be President wished to take by locating it between two equally unreasonable and immoderate "extremes." It was, indeed, the magic of triangulation that allowed Clinton to free himself from the Democratic party's (and his wife's) dated and truly extreme brand of 60's Left-liberalism while still setting himself over against the putatively no less extreme alternative offered by conservatives and Republicans.

But the deeper lesson of the Morris philosophy, and the one that Clinton seems to have absorbed more completely, is that the most powerful political asset in the modern era is not clear convictions, not ideas, and not even majorities in Congress, but rather high favorable ratings from voters. And the way to secure those high ratings is to treat the American electorate as a giant focus group, testing whatever one has in mind to do or say—sending troops to Bosnia, framing a speech on welfare reform—by how it registers in the polls.

Today, Clinton's favorable ratings have become nothing short of a political life raft, both for him and for his party. What is more remarkable, despite mounting evidence of presidential wrongdoing, an

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ignored agenda in Congress, humiliations abroad, and few signs of electoral success, the Democrats are enjoying a strange resurgence. In the midst of the greatest scandal since Watergate, they actually seem to have seized the national initiative from their Republican opponents.

HOW HAS this happened? By any objective measure, the Clinton era has been calamitous for the Democratic party. Since the President took office in January 1993, the party has suffered a series of defeats at virtually every level of government and in every region of the country. At the time Bill Clinton was elected, 30 states had Democratic governors; today, the number is down to eighteen. If, six years ago, nearly 60 percent of legislators in statehouses across the country were Democrats, now only 52 percent are. The two largest cities in the U.S., Los Angeles and New York, have elected Republican mayors. And, most notably, in the midterm election of 1994, the Democrats lost control of both houses of Congress for the first time in four decades.

There are other signs of weakness. Since 1992, nearly 400 elected officials nationwide, including five Congressmen and two Senators, have switched party affiliation from Democratic to Republican. Voter allegiance has likewise been affected: two months after Clinton took office, 52 percent of respondents to a *New York Times* survey said they most closely identified with the Democratic party; this past May, only 44 percent of respondents gave the same answer.

The weakness of the party's support may help explain why it has failed to nurture a new generation of national leaders even as a Democratic President has been occupying the White House. The Clinton cabinet is uniformly unimpressive, and there are no promising legislators in either the House or Senate. The two most able Democratic governors, Lawton Chiles of Florida and Zell Miller of Georgia, are both stepping down this fall.

Prospects on the presidential level are even bleaker. Vice President Al Gore is the obvious leading candidate to win the Democratic nomination in 2000; the only other names that register a significant response in a recent poll of Democratic voters are Richard Gephardt, the House majority leader, and Jesse Jackson. None of these three is exactly a fresh face. In fact, all three ran and lost to Michael Dukakis ten years ago in the 1988 Democratic primaries.

As for the President himself, he has been busy doing nothing. In the months since the story of his connection with Monica Lewinsky first appeared, his greatest effort has been expended avoiding any public discussion of his personal behavior; instead, he has set his aides on an aggressive attack against the credibility of Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel investigating the White House scandals. In the meantime, the initiatives he trumpeted in his State of the Union speech last January have gone languishing.

Thus, the President's education agenda, including the rhetorically powerful proposal to hire 100,000 teachers, was easily defeated in Congress with barely a whimper of opposition. Another State of the Union proposal, to expand the Medicare program by making benefits available to lower-income citizens beginning as early as age fifty-five, had all the earmarks of success, yet it, too, seems to have been dropped from debate. Calls from the White House for new child-care benefits and an increase in the minimum wage have simply been ignored.

As meaningful proposals have been brushed aside, the list of trivial political gimmicks masquerading as Clinton policy has grown quite lengthy. The President's plan to "save Social Security" is in fact no plan at all, only rhetoric, and has been treated as such by Congress. His "initiative" on race has been a national embarrassment, quickly degenerating into a series of opportunities for the President to participate in town meetings, still his favorite setting for uttering carefully phrased pieties. Other new "initiatives" from the White House over the past several months have included federal funding of bullet-proof vests for police officers, still more punishments for deadbeat dads, and a plan to conduct background checks on child-care workers.

Clinton's domestic weakness has had an impact on his ability to conduct foreign policy as well. Although the President appealed personally to the leader of Pakistan to refrain from testing nuclear weapons in May, the appeal was politely ignored, as was Clinton's prior request to G-8 leaders that sanctions be placed on India for exploding a nuclear device. In June, the *New York Times* revealed that Iran has long been violating a U.S.-imposed trade embargo by selling oil to Turkey—with tacit U.S. permission; our inability to enforce economic sanctions on Iran seems perfectly in keeping with what has been revealed about unlawful transfers of American technology to China. In the former Yugoslavia, the Clinton State Department has been protesting—futilely—against assaults on ethnic Al-

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banians by the forces of Slobodan Milosevic. Only against democratic Israel, apparently, has it been deemed safe in recent months to display American muscle (and then only fitfully).

WHY, THEN, with so many legislative defeats, with presidential credibility diminishing abroad, and with a White House submerged in subpoenas and scandals, are the Democrats not slumped in dejection? Why, to the contrary, does the party appear more buoyant than at any time since the Republicans took control of Congress in November 1994?

Some of this surely has to do with the President's approval ratings, which, against all odds, continue to remain solidly above 60 percent. Many explanations have been advanced for these high ratings, the most plausible of which point to a thriving domestic economy, a still-healthy stock market, and a world largely at peace. It has also been suggested, paradoxically, that thanks to Clinton, public expectations of presidential performance have been significantly lowered.

There is something to each of these explanations, but what they all overlook is the link between the ratings and what the President is doing—i.e., nothing. In other words, the fundamental reason for the high ratings may be a circular one: the President will not make a move without testing its resonance with voters, and the voters evidently do not wish him to make any bold move at all. For the time being, then, our political life is in stasis.

At any rate, and perhaps because they have nothing to lose, the Democrats have been following the President's lead, taking their own page from Dick Morris's 1996 playbook and "triangulating" every issue in sight. And again as with the President, the issues on which they have carefully chosen to concentrate their energies are increasingly symbolic, if not downright touchy-feely. The party that once agitated over staples like poverty, Medicare, worker safety, and environmental protection now focuses on such safe and virtually controversy-proof matters as patients' rights, campaign-finance reform, and tobacco. On none of these three matters do the Democrats have the slightest intention of devising a substantive remedy.

No one could miss the irony of Democratic enthusiasm for a new federal "patients' bill of rights." Four years ago, the party came a cropper because of a White House plan that would have subjected the entire national health-care system to rigid government control. Today, the Democrats seem bent on exploiting the high level of discontent that has accompanied the spread of private-sector managed care; but their proposed solution—the pending legislation known as the Patient Access to Affordable Health Care Act—would, if taken seriously, subject the relationship of doctors and patients to an extraordinary degree of federal control and have the certain effect of hiking insurance premiums in a period when health-care inflation has finally been reduced to manageable levels. Luckily, the Democrats are not serious. The real purpose of the proposed "patients'-rights" legislation is to engage in partisan politics by tagging every critic of this outlandish bill as an enemy of quality medical care for Americans.

Similarly with campaign-finance reform. As has been pointed out time and time again, any legislation designed to penalize candidates who surpass an arbitrary spending limit would have the effect of restricting political speech and would be unconstitutional on its face. The same goes for bans on contributions from political-action committees (PAC's) and spending on "issue advocacy." But the fact that their proposed remedy to campaign-finance abuse would never survive a Supreme Court challenge is once again immaterial to the Democrats. The issue is merely a ploy.

Last fall, national polls showed that voters trusted Republicans over Democrats to deal with campaign-finance issues. And with good reason: for much of 1997, the President, the Vice President, and the Democratic National Committee were immersed in troubles over, precisely, campaign donations. Hence the sudden rally behind the McCain-Feingold bill, which serves the dual purpose of deflecting attention away from Democratic misdeeds and of embarrassing Republicans by painting *them* as conscienceless opponents of "reform."

But the granddaddy of Democratic issues in the late-Clinton era is undoubtedly tobacco. The legislation that was finally stopped by the Senate in June, as empty and vague as legislation gets, provided an opportunity for political demagoguery surpassing even Washington's normal standards, with the President describing opponents of the bill as "standing in the way of saving one million children's lives." For all the rhetorical heat generated by the issue, however, Democrats never adequately explained why the centerpiece of their bill was a $500-billion tax increase that represented the kind of regressive levy that Democrats have traditionally condemned because the burden would fall directly on lower-income households. Nor, in their insistence that the bill's ban on advertising would reduce teen smoking, did they ever acknowledge

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the absence of any evidence linking advertising or promotion with increased levels of tobacco consumption. Once again, symbolism and name-calling were all.

PATIENTS' RIGHTS, campaign-finance reform, tobacco: these have become the Democrats' legislative equivalents of what in electoral campaigns are known as "wedge issues"—issues intended to score high ratings in focus groups and to spook the opposition. But here, truly, the Democrats have succeeded: the opposition has indeed been spooked.

To be sure, confusion has prevailed in Republican ranks for quite some time now. Ever since the disastrous government shutdown in the winter of 1995, congressional Republicans have failed to find a way of reframing the national debate on their terms. Moreover, on a whole series of major issues that once united the party—foreign intervention, taxes, immigration, free trade—there are deep internal fissures that Republican leaders have not begun to repair.

Still, in the wake of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, many conservatives sensed that the moment had come for Republicans once again to seize the political initiative. Writing in early February in the *Weekly Standard*, the columnist Fred Barnes predicted:

> [I]f Republicans don't screw up, they can substitute much of their agenda for Clinton's: a ban on partial-birth abortion, a serious tax cut for individuals, a child-care bill far different from the one envisioned by the Clinton administration, a more aggressive stand against liberal judges and judicial nominees. And that's only for starters. The opening is there, so long as Republicans don't get sidetracked with intraparty squabbles over impeachment.

The Republicans did get sidetracked, however, and not by impeachment hearings. Instead, the GOP has been taken in by the superficial appeal of the new Democratic "issues." Rather than attempting to establish an agenda of their own, the Republicans have found themselves struggling to come up with compromise positions that will allow them to escape the charge of being a party of, in effect, tobacco growers, heartless insurance companies, and wealthy industrialists who believe money buys influence. Whereas, in 1996, a Democratic President found himself signing into law a whole series of Republican initiatives that he awkwardly tried to claim as his own—welfare reform, a balanced budget, a line-item veto, a reduction in the capital-gains tax—in the space of two years the situation has almost reversed itself. The Republicans are now on the verge of crafting and delivering legislation to the President that reflects an agenda entirely driven by what was supposed to be a chastened and enfeebled Democratic party.

The electoral consequences of this state of affairs will become visible in November's midterm elections. Although few believe that the Democrats have any chance of regaining a majority in the Senate, where they would need to pick up five seats, the race could be much closer in the House. The National Democratic Congressional Committee decided early on not to fund any challenger in a traditionally Republican district, which means that more than 50 GOP House members are running unopposed. This strategy has permitted the Democrats to focus on a handful of key races. A swing of just eleven seats, the smallest margin in over 40 years, could return the Democrats to power and make Richard Gephardt Speaker of the House.

Traditionally, off-year elections benefit the party that does not hold the White House. Not too many months ago, Republicans were rubbing their hands in gleeful anticipation of a replay-in-reverse of November 1974, when, following President Nixon's resignation over Watergate, the Democrats picked up 49 House seats; Speaker Newt Gingrich openly contemplated the possibility of a net gain this fall of 40 Republican seats. Today, Republican confidence has largely vanished. Unless the party succeeds in changing the terms of debate, a GOP sweep of both chambers will be hard to engineer.

BUT ALL that is in the near term. In the medium and longer term it remains undeniable that, the present flush on Democratic cheeks notwithstanding, the party is in a bad way—indeed, the flush is itself a sign of just how bad a way.

As the Senate minority leader, Tom Daschle, well knows, a united Democratic caucus is the most potent weapon he has; but one of the things that has enabled him to hold this caucus together is the fact that its current members display no firm allegiance to any set of policies or point of view. Even now, unlike the Republicans who ran under a unified "Contract" in 1994, the party is encouraging prospective Democratic candidates in November to articulate whatever platform suits them. According to the *Washington Post*, a sizable number of Democrats hoping for election have been espousing pro-life, anti-gun-control, and small-government platforms. Having abandoned traditional Democ-

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ratic themes and even traditional Democratic constituencies—there have been, for example, no efforts to advance legislation that would appease the party's numerous black or gay activists—the Democrats will find it increasingly hard to energize their "base" voters of teachers, union members, and minorities.

The party is also hurting for money. Indeed, the 1994 loss of majority status in both houses of Congress, followed quickly by revelations of campaign-funding malfeasance, has rendered the Democrats financially more desperate than at any time in recent memory. So cash-starved is the party that in April its national headquarters sent over $1 million in "soft money"—i.e., donations that cannot be used directly for political races—to state parties, which then immediately returned it in the form of "hard-money" contributions. While both parties have long resorted to such sleights-of-hand in specific races, this was the first time the ruse has been conducted on such a massive scale. Financial straits also explain why it was so important this past June for organized labor to defeat the "pay-check protection" referendum (Proposition 226) in California. Had the proposition succeeded, unions would have been prevented from directing a portion of their members' dues to political activity, thus cutting off one of the major sources of Democratic money.

But the Democrats' largest problem, and the one accounting for the long catalogue of weaknesses I enumerated earlier, is the loss of identity. Since the defeat of Jimmy Carter by Ronald Reagan in 1980 and the spread of popular conservative politics in the United States, professional Democrats have been agonizing over the future. When, in 1992, Bill Clinton was elected to the presidency along with fresh Democratic majorities in Congress, hopes ran high that he would oversee the revival both of the party and of American liberalism. It was widely believed at the time that the most promising path forward was some form of "New Democratic" agenda that would steer the party successfully away from the McGovernite brand of liberalism that had dominated it in the 70's and 80's.

Now, six years into Clinton's presidency, the debate over political ideology is still unresolved. Some conservative journalists, including Robert Novak, have argued all along that, whatever platform he ran on to get elected, the President remains a deeply rooted old-style liberal, willing to expand government and promote McGovern- or Ted Kennedy-style causes whenever politically feasible. By contrast, Al From, the leader of the centrist Democratic Leadership Council, contends that Clinton is not only a New Democrat himself but has successfully spread New Democratic ideas throughout the party.

Each of these interpretations, as well as others more nuanced than they, misses the mark. The Democratic party is not rooted in the 60's past, and it is not headed toward the New Democratic future; it is not moving in *any* particular direction. It is merely aping the *modus operandi* of a President who has learned how to remain "popular" while having no genuine source of political strength or adhering to any particular set of principles. In the current age, both the old "progressive" liberalism of Ted Kennedy and the new centrist liberalism of Al From have been trumped by the focus-group liberalism of Bill Clinton.

It is important to distinguish here, for it could be plausibly objected that the Republicans' Contract With America in 1994 was equally dependent on survey data and focus groups. The difference is that the ideas advanced by congressional Republicans in that year—a balanced budget, term limits, congressional accountability—were all well-established policies of the party. The provisions of the Contract With America were, moreover, but the fine print of a broader theme—the perils of big-government and welfare-state liberalism—and of a common Republican ideology that every candidate could run on.

Democrats, by contrast, have only Joe Camel and the Ken Starr "witch hunt" to fall back on. Lacking any larger theme or deep-seated belief, the party, like the President, now seems destined to spend the next two years jumping from one hot-button issue to the next, pinning its hopes on the continued self-destructiveness of the GOP and on continued high approval ratings for the President. The first may be a relatively safe bet; the second is a thin reed on which to hang the future of a national political party.

BY NOW, as TV pundit Christopher Matthews has observed, there has accumulated "an O.J. level of evidence" that Bill Clinton engaged in a sordid sexual relationship with a White House intern half his age, lied about it point-blank to the American people, denied it during a sworn deposition, and possibly directed others to prevent federal investigators from learning the truth. What is the party doing about this? When first faced with the prospect of an imminently imploding presidency in January, Democrats across the country understandably hesitated to react; but *no* elected lead-

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ers rushed to the President's defense, or branded the charges implausible on their face. It was only as the weeks went by and the President's approval ratings recovered that Democrats in Congress and around the country decided, after all, to keep their party's wagon hitched to the fortunes of Bill Clinton. They are, in effect, betting that the public does not care whether the President is, as the columnist Michael Kelly has called him, a shocking liar.

The decision to stick with Clinton rather than break ranks (as many Republicans did with Nixon in the final months of Watergate) may well represent a turning point. Instead of using this election year to develop a compelling alternative to Republican ideas, the Democratic party has embraced a crass populism and a pragmatic cynicism learned at the feet of its current master. Unfortunately, this means that, without alternative leaders, without a comprehensive agenda, without even the financial support to compete against established Republicans, the Democratic party has only Bill Clinton to save it.

In *The Agenda*, Bob Woodward's inside view of economic policy making during the early years of the administration, Clinton is quoted as telling his aides: "I could never have survived the presidential campaign of '92—never—if it had just been a personal odyssey." Now, in the twilight of his presidency, the Democratic party has become little more than a minor bit player in the personal odyssey of Bill Clinton. Elected in 1992 to bring the Democratic party back to the mainstream, he has instead succeeded in making the party over in his own corrupt image. Whether or not *he* survives, *it* is sinking ever deeper into a morass.

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IQ Since "The Bell Curve"

Christopher F. Chabris

THIS PAST January, Governor Zell Miller of Georgia asked his legislature for enough money to give a cassette or CD of classical music to every newborn child in the state. The governor cited scientific evidence to support this unusual budget request. "There's even a study," he declared in his State of the State address, "that showed that after college students listened to a Mozart piano sonata for ten minutes, their IQ scores increased by nine points." And he added: "Some argue that it didn't last, but no one doubts that listening to music, especially at a very early age, affects the spatial-temporal reasoning that underlies math, engineering, and chess."

The so-called "Mozart effect" is one of the most publicized recent examples of our ongoing preoccupation with intelligence, a subject that not only refuses to go away but continues to raise whirlwinds of controversy. The largest such controversy, of course, surrounds *The Bell Curve* (1994), by the late Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray. A mountain of essays and books purporting to refute that work and its conclusions grows and grows to this day. But now we also have the magnum opus of Arthur Jensen,[1] a leading figure in IQ research and, like Herrnstein and Murray, a favorite target of academic liberals, as well as a posthumous volume by another leading IQ researcher, Hans Eysenck.[2] So it is a good moment to look again at what we know, what we do not know, and what we think we know about this vexed subject.

IN *The Bell Curve*, Herrnstein and Murray set out to prove that American society was becoming increasingly meritocratic, in the sense that wealth and other positive social outcomes were being distributed more and more according to people's intelligence and less and less according to their social backgrounds. Furthermore, to the extent that intelligence was not subject to easy environmental control, but was instead difficult to modify and even in part inherited, genetic differences among individuals, Herrnstein and Murray posited, would contribute significantly to their futures.

The evidence for this thesis came largely from an analysis of data compiled in the National Longitudinal Study of Youth (NLSY), an ongoing federal project that tested over 10,000 Americans in 1980, with follow-up interviews regularly thereafter. Each participant completed the Armed Forces Qualifying Test (AFQT)—which, like any diverse test of mental ability, can be used as a mea-

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[1] *The g Factor: The Science of Mental Ability*. Praeger, 672 pp., $39.95.

[2] *Intelligence: The New Look*. Transaction, 232 pp., $29.95.

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sure of intelligence—and was then evaluated for subsequent social outcomes (including high-school graduation, level of income, likelihood of being in jail, likelihood of getting divorced, and so forth). As a rule, a person's intelligence turned out to predict such outcomes more strongly than did the socioeconomic status of his parents. This relationship held for all ethnic groups; indeed, when intelligence was statistically controlled, many "outcome" differences among ethnic groups vanished.

Herrnstein, a professor of psychology at Harvard with an impeccable reputation for scientific integrity, died of cancer just a week before *The Bell Curve* arrived in bookstores. This in itself may have had something to do with the frenzy of the public response. Had Herrnstein lived to participate in the debate, critics might have found the book harder to malign than it became when Murray, whose training was not in psychology but in sociology, was left to promote and defend it by himself.

Not that Murray, the author of *Losing Ground* (1984) and a vocal critic of the liberal welfare state, failed to do so energetically. But his lack of credentials as a hard scientist, and his overabundant credentials as a scourge of liberalism, made him a tempting target for an attack that was itself motivated as much by political as by scientific differences, and that was almost entirely focused on a side-issue in the book. That side-issue was differences in intelligence not among individuals but among groups—and specifically between whites and blacks—and the degree to which those differences might or might not be explained genetically. So heated, and so partisan, was the furor at its peak that even President Clinton was asked about the book at a press conference. (He had not read it, but disagreed with it nonetheless.)

But the overreaction to what was in essence a moderate and closely reasoned book would also not have surprised Herrnstein in the least. If anything, it was a replay—actually, a more civilized replay—of what had happened to him after he published his first article on intelligence in the *Atlantic* in 1971. That article, entitled "IQ," besides bringing to public attention several points raised by Arthur Jensen in a 1969 paper in the *Harvard Educational Review*, offered a more speculative version of the argument that would be fleshed out and documented with NLSY data in *The Bell Curve* 23 years later.

Just as with *The Bell Curve*, only a small portion of Herrnstein's 1971 article dealt with differences among groups, and only a portion of that portion dealt with possible genetic influences on those differences; and, just as with *The Bell Curve*, these were the passages that received the greatest attention. In his article, Herrnstein concluded that "although there are *scraps of evidence* for a genetic component in the black-white difference, *the overwhelming case* is for believing that American blacks have been at an *environmental disadvantage*" (emphasis added). This did not stop one Nathan Hare from writing in response that "one would think that the pseudo-scientific generalizations surrounding race and IQ had long been put to rest. But the ghoulish die hard." Nor did it keep students at Harvard and elsewhere from putting up posters accusing Herrnstein of racism and calling him "pigeon-man" (in reference to his animal-learning research). His lectures were filled with protesters, and his speeches at other universities were canceled, held under police guard, or aborted with last-second, back-door escapes into unmarked vehicles. Death threats were made.

PEOPLE OFTEN react most defensively when challenged not on their firmly held beliefs but on beliefs they wish were true but suspect at some level to be false. This is the psychology behind the controversy that ensued after "IQ" in 1971 and *The Bell Curve* in 1994.[3] On each occasion intemperate articles were written (some by the same people, barely updated), and the most strident positions were taken by those least qualified to comment on the science.[4]

By now, five major books have been published in direct response to *The Bell Curve*. Two of them, though critical, are within the bounds of reasonable discourse. Thus, *Intelligence, Genes, and Success* (1997), edited by four professors from the University of Pittsburgh who seem opposed to the book's public-policy conclusions, offers a fairly balanced range of scholarly views. On the sensitive question of heritability, what is especially notable is that the argument takes place mainly at the margins; although some of the book's contributors contend that the heritability of intelligence falls within a range lower than the 40–80 percent given by Herrnstein and Murray, that range is in every case much greater than zero.

[3] For Richard J. Herrnstein's account of what happened after he published his *Atlantic* article, see his "On Challenging an Orthodoxy," COMMENTARY, April 1973. For Charles Murray's account of the later controversy, see his "*The Bell Curve* and Its Critics," COMMENTARY, May 1995 and subsequent letters, August 1995.—ED.

[4] In the case of *The Bell Curve*, a special committee set up by the American Psychological Association to report on the basic science eventually backed all of the book's main claims, as did an open letter signed by several dozen of the nation's most qualified intelligence researchers.

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A tougher line is taken in *Inequality by Design: Cracking the Bell Curve Myth* (1996), written by six Berkeley sociologists. This book addresses Herrnstein and Murray's main argument—that intelligence is an important determiner of social outcomes in America. To their credit, the authors do some old-fashioned hard work, reanalyzing the NLSY data and even making one correction that strengthens *The Bell Curve*'s conclusions. But their main effort is to show, by adding variables other than parental socioeconomic status to the mix of factors predicting outcomes, that intelligence is not as important as *The Bell Curve* claims. Murray has since responded to this argument in a pamphlet entitled *Income Inequality and IQ* (published by the American Enterprise Institute); there, by considering only the NLSY data from sibling groups, within which parental background is by definition equal, he is able to show that intelligence still has very strong effects.

The conclusion one may reasonably draw from these two books, and from Murray's response, is that while intelligence may matter more or less than family background, it certainly matters, and that if it is not entirely heritable, it is heritable in some degree. It is useful to bear this in mind when considering the other three books, for one would scarcely know from reading them that such a view has any reputable backing at all. Though a few chapters in *Measured Lies* (1996), the most vituperative and scientifically irrelevant of the five volumes under consideration, attempt data-based argumentation, most settle for sarcasm, self-righteousness, and name-calling. And then there are *The Bell Curve Debate* and *The Bell Curve Wars* (both published in 1995); the former is an anthology of historical documents and reviews, mostly negative, which the editors rightly claim represent the general trend among responses to Herrnstein and Murray's book; the latter is a set of essays, also mostly negative, that originally appeared in a single issue of the *New Republic* when *The Bell Curve* was first published, with a few similar pieces added for effect.

According to its back cover, *The Bell Curve Wars* "dismantles the alleged scientific foundations . . . of this incendiary book." Since, however, the vast majority of those commenting on *The Bell Curve* in the anthology's pages have little or no scientific authority, whoever wrote those last words probably had in mind the single entry by the Harvard zoology professor Stephen Jay Gould. That essay, entitled "Curveball," was originally published in the *New Yorker* and appears both in *The Bell Curve Wars* and *The Bell Curve Debate*, occupying the first position in each. In it, Gould repeats many of the same accusations of racism and attributions of political motive that he made in his 1981 book, *The Mismeasure of Man*, written in response to the earlier controversy sparked by Jensen and Herrnstein.

Within the social-science community and the academic world in general, Gould's critique has been widely accepted as the canonical demonstration that the concepts of intelligence and its heritability are at best nonscientific and at worst racist and evil. (For instance, all of the contributors to *Measured Lies* who cite Gould's essay do so approvingly, if we count the one who asserts that it does not go far enough.) Indeed, so well has *The Mismeasure of Man* endured that in 1996 its publisher reissued it with a new introduction and appendices, including the ubiquitous "Curveball," but left the main text essentially unrevised.

Gould charges that the craniometrists of the 19th century, and later intelligence researchers as well, operated from racist assumptions, and implies that on those grounds their work should be ignored or even suppressed. Insofar as the charge is meant to include figures like Herrnstein and Murray, it is absurd as well as malicious. But even in those cases in the past in which racist assumptions can indeed be demonstrated, the proof of the pudding remains in the eating, not in the beliefs of the chef. Useful science can proceed from all sorts of predispositions; nor—it seems necessary to add—do the predispositions of scientists always point in the same direction, especially where discussions of human nature are concerned.

Before World War II, for example, the anthropologist Margaret Mead, presumably basing herself on her observations of non-Western cultures, wrote: "We are forced to conclude that human nature is almost unbelievably malleable, responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural conditions." Later, Mead admitted that what forced this conclusion was not the data she had collected but the political goals she espoused: "We knew how politically loaded discussions of inborn differences could become. . . . [I]t seemed clear to us that [their] further study . . . would have to wait upon less troubled times." As the shoot-the-messenger responses of Gould and others show, the times may still be too troubled for the truth.

But what about Gould's main *scientific* contention—that, as he puts it in his 1996 introduction to *The Mismeasure of Man*, "the theory of unitary, innate, linearly rankable intelligence" is full of "fallacies"?

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The theory that Gould is attacking usually goes under the name of *general intelligence*. Its advocates, practitioners of the hybrid psychological-statistical discipline known as psychometrics, argue simply that while individuals differ in their abilities in a wide range of intellectual realms, a relationship exists among these variations that can be attributed to a common factor. This common factor is what the psychometricians label general intelligence, or *g*.

A brief example will illustrate the evidence they adduce for this proposition. Suppose a group of students takes a set of ten, timed mental-ability tests, five based on verbal materials (such as choosing antonyms) and five based on spatial materials (such as drawing paths through mazes). Each student will receive ten scores, and each student will have a unique profile of scores, higher on some tests than others.

Now suppose we correlate mathematically the students' scores on the five verbal tests. We will probably find them positively, though not perfectly, correlated—that is, the score on one will predict reasonably well the scores on the others. With the aid of a statistical procedure known as factor analysis, we can examine the pattern of these positive correlations and infer that they can be explained by the existence of a common factor, the most logical candidate being the "verbal ability" of the students who took the tests. Analogous results would likely occur if we factor-analyzed the set of five spatial tests.

What if we combined all ten tests in a single analysis, looking at all the possible correlations? Most likely we would find separate verbal and spatial factors at work. But those factors themselves will almost always be correlated. A superordinate, or "general," factor—*g*—can then be extracted to account for the commonalities across all the tests, though this factor will be revealed more by some tests than by others; such tests, known as "highly *g*-loaded," are taken as especially good measures of general intelligence.

TO THE extent that it is not simply political, the debate that followed *The Bell Curve* and "IQ," and that lies at the heart of Gould's critique in *The Mismeasure of Man*, is over the very existence and coherence of general intelligence. Each side has made the same points over and over, and each side believes it has refuted the other side's arguments. The reason this is so is that the two sides proceed according to different definitions of intelligence.

The psychometric camp, which includes Herrnstein and Murray, Jensen, Eysenck, John Carroll (whose 1993 treatise, *Human Cognitive Abilities*, offers the most extensive factor-analysis of mental tests), and most psychologists who have traditionally studied the topic, hold to a conception of intelligence that closely matches what common sense and the dictionary tell us the term means. The opposing side, which sports a more eclectic set of disciplinary backgrounds and prides itself on a more sophisticated and inclusive perspective, divides human abilities into broad classes—logical, spatial, interpersonal, verbal, etc.—and labels each class an "intelligence." The two sides then proceed to talk past each other.

Scientists make bad dictionary writers and worse philosophers. Their main skills are in constructing experiments and generating explanations for what they observe. Neither of these endeavors requires agreement on what the words involved "mean" in any deep or absolute sense, only on ways of converting the elements of the theory at issue into operations that can be carried out in an experiment and repeated later if necessary. Measurement is the most important such operation; as Kelvin pointed out long ago, without a way to measure something it cannot be studied scientifically.

This is why the oft-repeated phrase, "intelligence is nothing more than what intelligence tests measure," is, as an objection, merely a tautology. The truth is that as long as intelligence can be reliably measured—it can be, with a variety of tests—and validly applied—it can be, to predict a variety of outcomes—it is intelligence. If we suddenly started calling it "cognitive ability," "cognitive efficiency," or even "the tendency to perform well on mental tests," it would still have the same scientific properties. Nothing about the natural world would change.

One way to test the schemes of the proponents of "multiple intelligences" would be to apply research techniques that might (or might not) suggest a role in them for general intelligence. But this is an exercise the advocates of multiple intelligences tend to rule out of consideration *a priori*. Thus, as Howard Gardner correctly notes in *Frames of Mind* (1983), there is good evidence that different parts of the brain are responsible for different abilities. However, when at a recent seminar a member of Gardner's research group was asked how abilities in the various intelligences are measured, the swift response was, "We don't measure them."

The reason is obvious: any reasonable system of measurement would produce a set of scores whose correlations could be calculated, and the pattern of those correlations would likely reveal a common

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factor—in other words, *g*—accounting for some fraction of the total variation. Gardner's theory is very popular in educational circles these days, as is the idea, espoused by Daniel Goleman in *Emotional Intelligence* (1995), that skill at managing one's own emotions and interpreting those of others is very valuable to social interaction and success in life. Surely both of these ideas are correct, as far as they go. But neither one of them addresses intelligence in a complete way.

ANOTHER CRITICISM of the notion of general intelligence is that it is based on factor analysis, an indirect procedure that deals with the structure of tests rather than the nature of the mind and brain. This is a point raised with special vehemence by Gould. In *The g Factor: The Science of Mental Ability*, Arthur Jensen shows that the objection is without foundation.[5]

The g Factor is a deep, scholarly work laden with hundreds of tables, graphs, and endnotes, some of them with tables and graphs of their own. It is balanced and comprehensive, summarizing virtually all the relevant studies on the nature of intelligence and demolishing most of the challenges and alternative explanations of the major findings. (It is not, however, an easy book for nonspecialists to read, which is why we are also fortunate to have Hans Eysenck's much more accessible and even entertaining *Intelligence: The New Look*.)

In refuting Gould's point, Jensen demonstrates that mental-test scores correlate not just with one another but with *many* measures of information-processing efficiency, including reaction time (how quickly you can press a button after a light flashes), inspection time (how long two separate line-segments must be displayed for you to judge accurately which is longer), and working-memory capacity (how many random items of information you can remember while doing something else). Jensen also reviews the many direct biological correlates of IQ, such as myopia (a very heritable condition), brain electrical activity, estimates of nerve-conduction velocity (the speed at which brain cells communicate with one another), and the brain's metabolism of glucose. Even brain size, the study of which is richly derided by Gould, has been found with modern imaging technology to correlate with IQ.

These chapters, among the most impressive in Jensen's book, put general intelligence as a psychological trait on a more solid foundation than is enjoyed by any other aspect of personality or behavior. They also speak persuasively to the issue of its heritability, the argument for which becomes more plausible to the extent that intelligence can be associated with biological correlates.

One can go farther. To Stephen Jay Gould and other critics, belief in the heritability of intelligence is inextricably—and fatally—linked to belief in *g*; destroy the arguments for one and you have destroyed the arguments for the other. But as Kevin Korb pointed out in a reply to Gould in 1994, and as Jensen affirms here, the *g* factor and the heritability of intelligence are independent concepts: either hypothesis could be true with the other being false. In some alternate reality, intelligence could be determined by wholly uncorrelated factors, or for that matter by wholly environmental (i.e., nonheritable) factors. It is simply less of a stretch to imagine that a *general* factor both exists and is somewhat heritable, since, as Jensen shows, this combination describes our own reality.

STILL ANOTHER line of attack used by the detractors of *g* is to point to studies allegedly showing that intelligence is easy to change (and, therefore, a meaningless concept). Arthur Jensen raised a firestorm three decades ago when he asked, "How much can we raise IQ and scholastic achievement?" and answered: not much. This brings us back to the Mozart effect, which purports to do in ten minutes what years of intensive educational interventions often fail to accomplish.

The Mozart effect was first shown in a study by Frances Rauscher, Gordon Shaw, and Katherine Ky that was reported in the British journal *Nature* in 1993. It is difficult to determine their experimental procedure with precision—their article was less than a page in length—but the essentials appear to be as follows. Thirty-six college students performed three spatial-ability subtests from the most recent version of the Stanford-Binet intelligence test. Before one of the tests, the students spent ten minutes in silence; before another, they listened to ten minutes of "progressive-relaxation" instructions; and before still another, they listened to ten minutes of Mozart's Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major (K. 448). The subjects performed the tests in different orders, and each test was paired

[5] Jensen's work should not be confused with another of almost the same title, *The g Factor: General Intelligence and its Implications*, by Christopher Brand. This provocative but worthy book was published in the United Kingdom early in 1996 and was withdrawn within two months, after negative media coverage and a frenzy reminiscent of the early 1970's. The publisher, Wiley, also canceled the book's distribution in the United States before any copies went on sale. Brand has since been fired from his teaching position at Edinburgh University, and has yet to find a new publisher.

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with equal frequency against each listening option. The results, when converted to the scale of IQ scores: 110 for silence, 111 for relaxation, and 119 for Mozart.

"Mozart makes you smarter!" said the press releases as new classical CD's were rushed to market. A self-help entrepreneur named Don Campbell trademarked the phrase "The Mozart Effect," published a book by the same name, and began selling cassettes and CD's of his own, including versions designed specially for children. Frances Rauscher testified before a congressional committee and gave many press interviews.

What was wrong with this picture? The article in *Nature* did not give separate scores for each of the three Stanford-Binet tasks (necessary for comparative purposes), and it used dubious statistical procedures in suggesting that listening to Mozart enhanced overall "spatial IQ" or "abstract reasoning." Nor did the researchers analyze separately the first task done by each subject, to rule out the possibility that prior conditions may have influenced the Mozart score. Finally, they claimed that the effect lasted for only ten to fifteen minutes, but gave no direct evidence; since the subjects were apparently tested only immediately after each listening episode, there was no way to see how this interval was calculated.

IN AN attempt to reproduce the finding that classical music enhances "abstract reasoning," Joan Newman and her colleagues performed a simple experiment: each of three separate groups comprising at least 36 subjects completed two separate subsets of Raven's Matrices Test (a good measure of *g*) before and after listening to either silence, relaxation instructions, or the Mozart-effect sonata. All three groups improved from the first test to the second, but by the same amount; in other words, Mozart was of no particular help. In another experiment along the same lines, a group led by Kenneth Steele asked subjects to listen to ever-longer strings of digits and repeat them backward; it, too, found no benefit from prior exposure to Mozart. Other independent tests reported similar failures or equivocal results.

In response to these experiments, Rauscher and Shaw have considerably narrowed the scope of their original findings. They now concede that the post-Mozart increase in spatial performance occurred on just one of the three Stanford-Binet tasks, while on the others, varying the listening condition made no difference. According to their revised estimate, only "spatiotemporal" tasks, which require the transformation of visualized images over time, are affected by complex music, not spatial ability or reasoning in general.

Unfortunately, however, neither *Nature* nor any journal of similar stature has given space to the follow-up experiments, most of which have been reported in *Perceptual and Motor Skills* or other low-prestige journals that many psychologists never read. And the media have of course moved on, leaving the babies of Georgia with state-sponsored gifts and the public with the vague idea that if ten minutes of music can "make you smarter," then IQ cannot signify very much.

Similarly feeding this mistaken impression are other recent examples of brief treatments affecting performance either negatively or positively on IQ-type tests. Thus, the researchers Claude Steele and Joshua Aronson told one group of black undergraduates at Stanford that a difficult verbal test would diagnose their abilities and limitations, and another group that their answers would be used only for research on verbal processing. In four separate experiments, students did worse under the former conditions than under the latter. Analogous results have been obtained with Asian female students in math tests: stressing to them that the test measures the abilities of their sex reduces their scores (women typically do worse than men in math), but stressing that it measures the abilities of their ethnic group increases their scores (Asians typically do better than other groups). But as Jensen points out, in such cases we are dealing with a stereotype about group differences that serves to increase or decrease test *anxiety*. That performance goes down when anxiety gets too high is a common enough finding in testing research, and says nothing about *g*.

What all these experiments do illustrate is that the human brain is a dynamic system whose functioning can change quite quickly. But this is not the same thing as changing intelligence itself. A few weeks of Prozac or another modern antidepressant can radically alter a person's behavior, but we still accept that his basic identity has not changed—he is still the man we knew before. Intelligence, too, is a stable characteristic of a person's behavior across a wide range of situations. He will be able to perform a task much better in one context than in another, with special training than without; but he is still the same person, and his intelligence is also still the same. Although the Mozart effect was promoted as though it were bad news for *The Bell Curve* and IQ, it is not.

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And neither, finally, is the much-talked-about "Flynn effect." Over the past 50 years, the average score on intelligence tests has risen about three points per decade. This means that we are all getting smarter—indeed, the average adult of 1998 is, psychometrically at least, smarter than 84 percent of the population was in 1948.

The Flynn effect is named after James Flynn, who has been studying it for over fifteen years (although the phenomenon had been noted as early as the 1930's). In a chapter of a new book, *The Rising Curve: Long-term Gains in IQ and Related Measures*,[6] Flynn notes that gains are occurring steadily in every country sampled, mainly in the West and the industrialized parts of Asia, though their size and specific nature varies in different cases. He believes the start of the increases coincided with industrialization in the 19th century, though the data are of course less reliable the farther back one goes. What he does not know is *why* the gains have been occurring, and the other contributors to *The Rising Curve* can offer only tentative theories at best.

Psychologists, like all scientists, prefer to test their theories with controlled experiments, but such experiments cannot be performed when the phenomenon to be explained is occurring throughout the world continuously over time. The difficulty in comparing times is that many things have changed *with* the times: the items on IQ tests are different; education is different; nutrition is better; airplanes, cars, radio, television, movies, computers, and the Internet have been invented; society has become more permissive and also more rewarding of risk-taking; testing is more widespread and people are more accustomed to being tested; birth rates are lower; and so on. Encompassing all of these time-correlated variables, the change in what might be called our cognitive environment has been simply tremendous over the past 150 years. The most relevant factors here are probably better nutrition—a topic Eysenck studied at the end of his career—plus greater, more diverse, and more complex stimulation of the brain by our everyday experiences.

Evidence of such a dramatic environmental effect on IQ scores should reinforce skepticism concerning a genetic basis for group differences. But, in any case, psychometric theory makes no claims about average or absolute levels of intelligence within or between populations, and behavioral genetics allows for complex environmental influences on traits that are still significantly heritable. And so, again contrary to popular belief, the concept of general intelligence remains as sound and as meaningful as ever, Flynn effect or no.

Having withstood so many attacks, will the psychometric study of intelligence survive? Alas, not necessarily. In a pattern reminiscent of an earlier episode in the annals of modern psychology, the impact of Stephen Jay Gould's critique has been reinforced by the lack of a forceful response to it by psychometricians themselves, leaving the impression even within psychology at large that general intelligence has been routed.

Just as Gould, a paleontologist, has chided psychologists for misunderstanding genetics, so, in a review of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* in 1959, the linguist Noam Chomsky chided behavioral psychologists for misunderstanding language. Like Gould, who has caricatured and ridiculed the notion of general intelligence and the factor analysis used to document it, Chomsky caricatured the tenets and methods of behaviorism, which argued that the task of psychology is to measure only behavior and to explain it only in terms of environmental and genetic causes, without referring to what goes on inside the head.

It took eleven years before a leading behaviorist, Kenneth MacCorquodale, answered Chomsky; the reason none of his colleagues had bothered to reply earlier, he explained, was that they found Chomsky's arguments simply uninformed and irrelevant to the work they did. In the meantime, however, Chomsky's review was widely read and subscribed to by the new wave of cognitive psychologists who were building a framework for psychology that remains dominant today.

Gould's book seems to have had a similar effect on young intelligence researchers. Although Jensen and several others did review *The Mismeasure of Man* very negatively at the time it appeared, like MacCorquodale they replied in obscure journals read mainly by their own supporters. Thanks in part to Gould's influence (and, of course, to the outrage directed against Jensen and Herrnstein in the 70's), the most popular new theories in the 1980's came to minimize the role of general intellectual ability in favor of other factors, to posit multiple "intelligences," and to give little attention to heritability. Now Eysenck, one of the heroes of psychometrics, and Herrnstein, one of its leading supporters, have died, Jensen and Carroll are approaching the end of their careers, and the psychometricians risk going into the same

[6] Edited by Ulric Neisser. American Psychological Association, 400 pp., $39.95.

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sort of extended bankruptcy proceedings as the behaviorists before them.

The great irony is that this is occurring just as the field of behavioral genetics has begun to thrive as never before. One of its most striking successes has been to document, through the convergence of numerous family and twin studies, the heritability of intelligence. Now researchers have been able to identify a specific gene whose variations are associated with differences in intelligence. This is a crucial step in building a complete theory of intelligence that can explain individual differences in biological as well as psychological terms. But the new generation of cognitive scientists, who focus on characteristics of the mind and brain that are common to everyone, are not too interested in differences among people, while the psychometricians, who stand to be vindicated, have been sidelined on their own playing field.

THE MOST basic claim put forth by Herrnstein and Murray was that smart people do better than dumb people. What is so troubling about that? We rarely encounter an argument over the fact that beautiful people do better than ugly people, or tall people better than short ones, though each of these propositions is also true. Is an intellectual meritocracy less just or moral than a physical one?

The answer, unfortunately, is that whenever intelligence is said, "race" is heard; whenever race is said, "genetics" is heard; and whenever genetics is said, "inferiority" is heard—even though these issues are not necessarily connected in any way. When I mentioned to friends that I was writing an article on intelligence, many were surprised, and some wanted to know why. I can only imagine how Herrnstein was treated by his colleagues during the last 25 years of his life. The public protests may have bothered him less than the fact that people in his own community never thought of him in the same way again: he had disturbed a pleasant conversation by bringing up unpleasant facts.

Since *The Bell Curve*, intelligence is stronger than ever as a scientific concept, but as unwelcome as ever as an issue in polite society. It would be reassuring to think that the next twenty years, which promise to be the heyday of behavioral genetics, will change this state of affairs. But if the past is any guide, many more phony controversies lie ahead.

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The Old People's Socialist League

Joseph Epstein

A wonderful man, Irving Howe. He's done so much for Yiddish literature and for me. But he's not a youngster any more, and still, still with this socialist meshugas.

—Isaac Bashevis Singer, 1981

All things considered, the literary critic and political intellectual Irving Howe is having a good afterlife. Since his death in 1993, his reputation, at least in certain quarters, seems only to have grown greater. Every so often one reads a worshipful word about him in the *New Yorker* or the *New Republic* or the *New York Times Book Review*. In a recent book, *Achieving Our Country*, the philosopher Richard Rorty comes very near to apotheosizing Howe, ranking his essays with those of George Orwell and Edmund Wilson, praising "his incredible energy and his exceptional honesty," and closing with the thought that, although "Howe would have loathed being called a warrior-saint, . . . this term does help catch one of the reasons he came to play the role in many people's lives which Orwell did in his."

And then there is the documentary film, *Arguing the World*. This film chronicles the undergraduate careers of four New Yorkers—Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, and Howe—and follows their political peregrinations since college days. In it, Howe seems to appear on screen more than any of the others, and to be talked about more admiringly; the last word is his; and, by virtue of the fact that he traveled the least far from his early political radicalism, he is subtly made to seem the hero of the story.

Howe is usually counted among the central figures of the group known as the New York intellectuals: a circle of writers and critics who gathered around *Partisan Review* in the 1930's and later around Commentary. Born in 1920, he was in fact a bit younger than the main figures in the group, and seems also in many ways to have been a psychologically less abstruse and more clearly driven character. Suffering no known writers' blocks, never (apparently) an analysand, he was an immensely productive writer—the author and editor of more than thirty books—as well as, starting in the mid-1950's, one of the founding editors and the main force behind the quarterly magazine *Dissent*.

Before going on to consider his career, though, I need to acknowledge a debt to Irving Howe, who encouraged me when I was a young writer. For a special issue of *Dissent* on blue-collar lives, Howe asked me in the early 1970's to write an article on the town of Cicero, outside Chicago. I was free-lancing at the time, and the fee, $500, seemed to me rather grand, especially given the proletarianized look of *Dissent*. Although Howe was not an impressive editor—*Dissent*, then as now, had a fairly high unreadability quotient—he did see it as part of his job to

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bring along younger writers. Certainly, he attempted to do so with me. I wrote three or four more pieces for *Dissent* over the next few years, including an attack on the then-emerging movement of neoconservatism and an introduction to the magazine's 25th anniversary issue.

I met Howe during this same period when he came to Chicago to read from *World of Our Fathers*, his big book about the immigrant Jews of New York that was then still a work in progress (it would be published to immense acclaim in 1976). When he arrived at my apartment, I was rather surprised at what seemed his lack of physical vanity, especially in a man one of whose weaknesses was said to be women (he married four times). To a friend who asked about Howe's appearance, I said that he looked as if his shirt were out of his pants—only it wasn't. He was tall but, after a New York youth in the socialist movement, there was nothing athletic or physically graceful about him. His tie was loose at the neck, his thin, receded hair barely combed. For a man who could command a rather elegant prose style, his physical style had about it something of the *shleppoisie*.

A kinder word, of course, would be *haimish*, or old-shoe, and Howe did have a way in conversation of making me, a youngish contributor to his magazine, feel myself his contemporary and even peer. While staying in Chicago, he was also able to convince his host, the then-chairman of the English department at Northwestern University, to offer me a teaching job. Since I had no Ph.D., and no teaching experience whatsoever, this must have been an interesting piece of persuasion. Twenty-five years later, I am still there.

When my own politics changed, Howe and I never had an official falling-out, only a falling-away. He may have thought me, in the old leftist phrase that was a favorite of his, a "sell-out"; more likely, he did not think of me at all, except perhaps as another younger writer who had slipped away. I continued to read him, mostly in the *New Republic*, sometimes in the *New York Review of Books* or the *New York Times Book Review*. I was asked to review his autobiography, *A Margin of Hope* (1982), but found it rather a joyless book and declined. By then, in any case, I had come to read Howe rather differently. I read him through a political loupe and with a slightly skeptical heart.

BUT THIS brings me to a new intellectual biography by Edward Alexander entitled *Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew*.* When, a few years ago, I heard that Alexander (a professor of English at the University of Washington in Seattle, and politically a conservative) was planning this book, I thought, as Igor Stravinsky is said to have remarked whenever he was presented with some new avant-gardeish musical creation, "Who needs it?" Howe was not, after all, a major figure even among his contemporaries. But now that preparations are apparently under way to make him into the American Orwell, it is good to have all the facts of his intellectual life before us. Alexander has written a solid and useful book.

Because of constraints placed upon Alexander by Howe's family—he has not been allowed, for instance, to quote from Howe's letters—*Irving Howe: Socialist, Critic, Jew* is also a relatively impersonal book. Although they knew each other (according to Alexander, Howe used to refer to him as his "favorite reactionary"), and although, from time to time, personal exchanges figure in the narrative, this is for the most part, as Alexander says, "a biography of Howe's mind": an attempt to understand the various positions, political and cultural, taken by Howe over a lengthy and contentious career.

The three terms in Alexander's title—socialist, critic, Jew—have the priorities in precisely the right order. Howe was first a socialist; then a critic; and finally a Jew, secularist division, literary branch. The three categories often fed into one another: the socialist in Howe often set the program for the literary critic, and both socialism and criticism aroused his interest in Yiddish literature, thus bringing out the Jew. But socialism was paramount.

Howe came of age in the mean teeth of the Depression, and no doubt it was the central public event of his life, conditioning and coloring all else. His father's grocery store went bankrupt in 1930, when Irving was ten, and the family, as he would report in *A Margin of Hope*, began "dropping from the lower middle class to the proletariat—the most painful of all social descents." His parents now worked in the dress trade—his mother as an operator, his father as a presser—and Howe grew up with memories of dispossessed families, all their belongings on the sidewalk.

Much more important to the young Irving Howe than the storefront *shul* in which he had his bar mitzvah was the headquarters of the Workman's Circle, where he became attracted to what was in those days known as the "movement" and would soon become, as he later called it, "my home and my passion." At fourteen, as he tells it in *A Margin of Hope*, he began attending Sunday-night meetings of the Young People's Socialist League. He would in

* Indiana University Press, 284 pp., $35.00.

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time acknowledge that his early socialism provided something akin to a replacement for the religion he never had; once he was under its spell, "everything seemed to fall into place: ordered meaning, a world grasped through theory, a life shaped by purpose."

Howe was never a member of the Communist party; he claimed that, as a boy, he was much put off by the Communists' stringent discipline. But he did become a Trotskyist. One gathers that he never altogether lost his admiration for the figure of Leon Trotsky, who seemed to excite a great many intellectuals through his ability to wield, with stunning success, both pen and (as commander of the Red Army after the Bolshevik Revolution) sword. Howe was always an anti-Stalinist—anti-Stalinism was at the heart of Trotskyism—and he was later a strong anti-Communist. But socialism itself, backed up by an early and thoroughgoing belief in Marxism, gave him all the rope he needed to tie himself in knots.

As an undergraduate at the City College of New York, Howe studied English literature—"it struck me as the easiest major, where I could bullshit the most"—and was smitten, like so many other young men with literary flair, by the work of Edmund Wilson, whose "moral gravity moved me." He also changed his name (he had been born Irving Horenstein). He was hardly the only Jew in the "movement" to do so, the ostensible purpose being to secure a broader American audience for the views of these budding radicals. Thus, Daniel Bell was originally Daniel Bolotsky, and Philip Rahv and William Phillips, the founding editors of *Partisan Review*, were born Ivan Greenbaum and William Litvinsky.

As a young man, Howe, who had discovered in himself a gift for political oratory, must have been an intolerable prig. Irving Kristol remembers Howe from their CCNY days as "thin, gangling, intense, always a little distant, his fingers incessantly and nervously twisting a cowlick as he enunciated sharp and authoritative opinions . . . the Trotskyist leader and 'theoretician.'" Ransacking the files for his early writings, Alexander finds Howe accusing the Communist-party *Daily Worker* of the heinous sin of being "pro-American." The wartime suicide of the exiled Austrian Jewish writer Stefan Zweig is attributed by the adolescent Howe to Zweig's cowardliness as a *petit bourgeois*. An ideological opponent, Louis Fischer, is attacked as "king of the philistines," and "prince of liars."

The first large issue on which Howe, barely out of his teens, weighed in was World War II. He did so as the editor of a four-page sheet called *Labor Action*, and the line he took was that this was a war "between two great imperialist camps"—Nazi Germany on the one side, Britain and America on the other—"to decide which shall dominate the world." It was a war, in other words, "conceived and bred by world capitalism," and therefore neither side deserved the support of socialists. Although he was not alone in this view—Dwight Macdonald took it, and the philosopher Sidney Hook once told me that he had to argue Philip Rahv and William Phillips out of adopting it as the position of *Partisan Review*—one is inevitably reminded here of George Orwell's famous crack that there are certain things one has to be an intellectual to believe, since no ordinary man could be so stupid.

Howe was drafted and served in the Army in Anchorage, Alaska. But throughout the war he continued, under a pseudonym, to attack America's participation in the conflict—this, despite the fact that Hitler's systematic massacre of the Jews of Europe was becoming widely known. Anyone who did not support the so-called "third-camp" position (neither pro-Allied nor pro-Nazi) was dismissed by him as villainous at worst, a boob at best. As late as 1947, Howe felt it a mistake for the U.S. to have entered the war; in a piece discussing the Nuremberg Trials, he claimed that the "real victims of Nazism" were the German working classes. Although he would later admit to the obtuseness of his views on World War II, he remained touchy, according to Alexander, about who had the right to remind him of them.

Edward Alexander understands the historical forces behind Irving Howe's turn to socialism, and he recognizes, too, what kept the socialist myth alive in Howe's mind and spirit up until the day of his death. Socialism apart, Alexander gives his subject high marks for acting with honor in his work as an anthologist and high cicerone to Yiddish literature in America, for his opposition to the student radicals and New Left intellectuals of the 60's and 70's, his attacks on those who attempted to politicize the teaching of literature in universities in the early 1970's, and his later stand against deconstructionists and other practitioners of literary theory. Alexander esteems Howe's worth as a literary critic, and he seems genuinely to have liked him as a person. He strains to treat him fairly; and in my view, he succeeds.

But this hardly means that he forgives all the misbegotten ideas that socialism led Howe to adopt. Politically and intellectually, Alexander holds Howe's feet to the fire. He declines to allow, as softer people often do, that Howe was somehow right even when he was wrong, or was right precisely for being wrong—that his putative idealism canceled his mis-

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takes, from his neutrality during the war to his on-again, off-again feelings for Israel to his willfully blind refusal to credit the reality of the success of American democratic capitalism. Throughout, Alexander stays on Howe's case, nailing him for errors both of commission and of omission. In this exercise, too, I believe he treats Howe fairly.

Still, taking up Howe's political positions one by one, demonstrating how many of these positions look foolish in the light of history, or in the light of one's own (inevitably) more sensible positions, has its limitations. This is a method of judgment, after all, by which few people can hope to 'scape whipping, history being more cunning than the human beings who make it, and opinions—especially intellectual opinions—being as volatile as biotechnology stocks. A more interesting question is one that Sidney Hook put to Howe after a brutal exchange in the 40's, in the course of which Howe actually called Hook a tool of the Vatican (now there's a notion to make one smile on a gray day): "I do not know whether it is your politics or your character which makes it constitutionally impossible for you to do elementary justice to people with whom you disagree."

Elementary justice is not easy to achieve with an opponent, particularly in politics. But what about in literature? Did Howe's politics also get in the way of his literary judgments?

Howe did not come to literature through advanced academic training, for he had no Ph.D. and he was never aligned with any particular school of criticism. Beginning with his war years in Alaska, he did a vast amount of reading; he seems to have gained his education in public (as many critics do), learning as he wrote. In 1953 he was given a position at Brandeis, where Philip Rahv also taught, and he remained a university teacher—a very good one, it is said—for the rest of his days, later moving to the graduate center of the City University of New York.

As a literary and cultural critic, Howe had a genuine talent for dramatizing ideas. He was much aided in this by his penchant for heightened phrasings. In his prose, militancy is "clenched," youth is "tensed with conviction," Faulkner's characters are "chafed" by the "clamp of family," and Debsian socialism is invaded by "the *dybbuk* of sectarianism." These rhetorical flourishes, which do not always bear too close scrutiny, can give Howe's prose an impressive tension and luster.

Howe was a perceptive, even a penetrating, reader—which is all that one can ask a critic to be—but his efforts were oddly unconcentrated. He wrote often about the phenomenon of modernism in the arts, but he came too late, as a critic, to add much to the enshrinement of the great modernist writers—Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Eliot—in the canon of Western literature. His three books on individual writers (Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner, and Thomas Hardy) are respectable but not memorable. He could, however, write the good general essay (on Edith Wharton); the stirring essay (on T. E. Lawrence); or the surprisingly well-informed essay (on the 19th-century story writer Nikolai Leskov). And he was excellent on Yiddish literature; if I had to bet which of Howe's literary works has the best chance of surviving, my money would be on the 1953 anthology, *A Treasury of Yiddish Stories*, which he edited with Eliezer Greenberg and to which the two men supplied a lengthy and brilliant introductory essay that put the subject of Yiddish literature on the American intellectual map.

Unlike Edmund Wilson, Howe was never able to direct the literary traffic when it came to the reputations of his contemporaries. He never wrote at serious length about Norman Mailer, whose wretched essay "The White Negro" originally appeared in *Dissent*. (Howe later apologized for it.) He left Saul Bellow pretty much alone. He once advised Ralph Ellison to align himself more strongly with the protest tradition in black writing, and got absolutely scorched by Ellison in a brilliant reply. But he did resoundingly put down the early feminist writer Kate Millett, at a time when it was useful to do so. And in a 1972 essay in COMMENTARY he crushed Philip Roth, who was so rattled that he composed an entire novel, *The Anatomy Lesson*, to dispatch a critic undeniably modeled after Irving Howe.

"POLITICS IN a work of literature," wrote Stendhal, "is like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar, and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention." Howe quotes this famous sentence at the outset of his own book of essays on *Politics and the Novel* (1957). Although he has been praised by his admirers for keeping politics out of his literary criticism, and for his capacity to judge works of art in their own terms, the truth is rather more complicated.

Not that Howe's literary criticism had an entirely polemical intent. But when it came to the crunch, he could not do what, in his essay on Leskov, he remarked that all great writers do—namely, write "in opposition to his own preconceptions." In *Politics and the Novel*, which he published while still in his thirties, Howe's politics forced him, in effect, to deny the gifts of two of the greatest writers in the history of the novel: Henry James and Joseph Conrad.

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That Howe was not an all-out admirer of James is less than shocking. James is, after all, not everyone's cup of caviar, and Howe's taste generally ran to more strongly patterned, less finely textured, more conflict-laden, less subtly nuanced fiction. In *Politics and the Novel*, the text for Howe's anti-James sermon is *The Princess Casamassima* (1887), James's coruscating psychological study of the radical temperament. In considering the novel, Howe gives out little grades—this character is strong, that one wanting in credibility—but then finally dismisses it altogether, largely on the grounds that James's cultural position renders him ill-equipped for his subject. "James's conservatism," Howe writes,

> was peculiarly the conservatism of an artist who has measured all the effort and agony that has gone into the achievements of the past and is not yet ready to skimp their value in the name of the unborn and untested future.

This is hardly the only place in his criticism where Howe reveals his own preference for the ideal over the real; that "unborn and untested future" he alludes to is, of course, the possibility of utopian socialism, while "conservatism," for a New York intellectual of that day, was a word that had the status of a profanity. But he is mistaken about James. What Howe identifies as political conservatism is really something else—a disbelief in the centrality of politics itself. In a key passage in *The Princess Casamassima*, James writes:

> The figures on the chessboard were still the passions and the jealousies and superstitions and stupidities of man, and thus positioned in regard to each other at any given moment could be of interest only to the grim fates who played the game—who sat, through the ages, bow-backed over the table.

This is a passage that Howe neglects to quote, and little wonder: the tragic view of life it encapsulates is entirely at odds with his own, politics-ridden, mentality.

The case against Conrad is made even more vehemently in *Politics and the Novel*. Conrad wrote two of the great political novels in the English language—*The Secret Agent* (1907) and *Under Western Eyes* (1910)—and both are devastatingly anti-revolutionary. Both, that is, come out strongly for the real over the ideal. In considering these novels, Howe begins by maintaining that all of Conrad's views were formed by his father's experience in Poland, where as a fighter for Polish freedom he and Conrad's mother were seized by the Russians and subsequently died in exile, and by Conrad's own guilt not merely over his failure to continue his father's struggle but over his need, his "conservative" need, for personal order.

A good bit of critical heavy breathing, of backing-and-filling, accompanies Howe's attempt to defuse the power of Conrad's two novels. Only at chapter's end does he allow that "in our fiercely partisan age it is difficult to read books like *Under Western Eyes* and *The Secret Agent* without fiercely partisan emotions." Imagine the emotions of Howe himself—who actually brings Trotsky in at one point to refute Conrad—when he came upon the following passage from *Under Western Eyes*:

> [I]n a real revolution—not a simple dynastic change or a reform of institutions—in a real revolution the best characters do not come to the front. A violent revolution falls into the hands of narrow-minded fanatics and of tyrannical hypocrites at first. Afterwards comes the turn of all the pretentious intellectual failures of the time. Such are the chiefs and leaders. You will notice that I have left out the mere rogues. The scrupulous and the just, the noble, humane, and devoted natures; the unselfish and the intelligent may begin a movement—but it passes away from them. They are not the leaders of a revolution. They are its victims: the victims of disgust, of disenchantment—often of remorse.
>
> Hopes grotesquely betrayed, ideals caricatured—that is the definition of revolutionary success.

Joseph Conrad wrote that in 1910, calling every shot in the Russian Revolution that was still seven years away. You might think that he would win a point or two for political prophecy; instead, the passage, which Howe quotes in part, is answered by him with a rather pathetic retort in the form of a well-worn quotation from Orwell: "All revolutions are failures, but they are not all the same failure." (In the modern age, truth to tell, they just about all are.)

George Orwell, like Irving Howe, had a little socialism problem of his own; he, too, could not quite let go of the subject. But Orwell, who died a relatively young man in 1950, was also a more honest writer. Irving Howe could never have written *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), Orwell's excruciatingly truthful account of the squalor of the working class and the kookiness of those attracted to socialist remedies for its problems. Going to Spain to observe the revolution in progress and

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join the fight against fascism, Orwell looked the Communist devil in the eye, and when he returned home he once again told the truth in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

Hilton Kramer has written about Irving Howe that "whenever the mystique of radical politics in general and the myth of socialism in particular have been allowed to dominate in his work, the result is all but worthless." This is a hard judgment but, I believe, a correct one—correct as applied to his literary criticism, and much more correct as applied to his writing on politics, which tends to be turgid, divorced from reality, and nearly unreadable.

Why did Howe invest so much intellectual and spiritual capital in so desiccating an idea? Socialism was, of course, the great compulsion of his youth, and it gave him both a social life and a way out of the immigrant Jewish milieu in which he was born. Socialism also provided the one political tradition in which intellectuals seemed to be able to exercise leadership and attain status. Nor is the power of displaced religious belief to be ignored. The last word in Howe's *Selected Writings, 1950-1990*, his final collection of essays, is given over to the conviction that the fall of the Soviet Union has in no way disqualified the socialist idea but that, to the contrary, once "the shadow of Stalinism recedes," socialism will emerge in its purer, uncontaminated form. Talk about waiting for the messiah.

From an early age, Howe had locked himself into a strict definition of the role of the intellectual. In his view, the intellectual was always the outsider, and intellectual life was really only valid when one lived it as a member of a minority. This minority was to be in permanent opposition, in a state of perpetual dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Only thus could one's radicalism be preserved intact. "I am dissatisfied, profoundly so, with the world as it is," said the late Alfred Kazin, who took an even greater pride than Howe in his own brand of self-righteous radicalism. "But I would be dissatisfied with any world. And I'd hate to lose my dissatisfaction."

The irony is that for Howe (as for Kazin), precisely this posture of alienation should have proved a winning ticket to the kind of worldly success he was forever claiming to deprecate. Unlike Orwell, who suffered material damage for his brave dissent from the party line on Spain, Howe never suffered at all for his radicalism. It helped land him a distinguished professorship, lectureships at Harvard and Princeton, a major commercial publisher, a MacArthur fellowship, and, now, posthumous beatification as a "warror-saint" of our age.

Did Howe ever sense that the heavy bag of largely false ideas he had chosen to carry through life had marred much of his literary criticism and guaranteed the irrelevance of his politics? One wonders. To judge the real against an imaginary ideal and always find the real wanting; to refuse to repudiate one's youthful positions, no matter how callow, lest one be thought to have grown cynical; to consider oneself in permanent opposition to the life of one's time; to dramatize the fear of selling out, even as the world makes a comedy of the drama by continually showering one with rewards; to live out one's days hostage to so many wrong ideas, notions, and biases—did Irving Howe ever say to himself, how do I put this bag down and take life as it and for what it is? I suppose it would be merciful to think that he never did.

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Learning from the Greeks

Algis Valiunas

A Greek revival—of sorts—is under way these days, as books by the ancients seem to be enjoying a boomlet in new translations. Robert Fagles's gorgeous version of Homer's *Odyssey*, the companion to his earlier translation of the *Iliad*,[1] has had a remarkable popular success, including being named as a main selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club. From the University of Pennsylvania Press have come the first three volumes in a series that will eventually comprise all the extant works of the playwrights Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Menander in new renditions by 40 different translators, most of them poets (and not all of whom know Greek).[2]

Another complete Aristophanes is planned by Oxford, which has already brought out the first volume, as well as a selection of four plays by Euripides and, for good measure, a new translation of Herodotus.[3] A new edition of Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian War* brings together the eloquent Victorian translation by Richard Crawley of this historical masterwork and an estimable scholarly apparatus of notes, marginal summaries, maps, and appendices.[4] And we also have *The Classical Greek Reader*, a compilation of excerpts from several dozen poets, playwrights, historians, mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers spanning a period of some thousand years; in addition to the most famous passages from the most famous works, the book offers a generous selection of lesser-known authors like Simonides, Empedocles, Isocrates, Protagoras, Anacreon, Praxilla, and Plotinus.[5]

Knowing just what to make of all this activity is, however, a tricky business. On the one hand, it is clearly and uncomplicatedly good news; the appearance of these works in, for the most part, affordable new editions is reason for ordinary readers—readers who look to literature to enrich and even to change their lives—to rejoice at their good fortune. But, on the other hand, the fact that thousands or even tens of thousands of people will be

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[1] *The Odyssey*, Penguin (paperback), 541 pp., $14.95; *The Iliad*, Penguin (paperback, 1990), 683 pp., $9.95.

[2] Aeschylus, vol. 1: *The Oresteia*, edited and translated by David R. Slavitt, 159 pp., $37.50 (paperback, $14.95).

Euripides, vol. 1: *Medea*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*, *The Bacchae*, edited by David R. Slavitt and Palmer Bovie, 298 pp., $40.00 (paperback, $16.95).

Euripides, vol. 2: *Hippolytus*, *Suppliant Women*, *Helen*, *Electra*, *Cyclops*, Slavitt and Bovie, eds., 360 pp., $40.00 (paperback, $16.95).

[3] Aristophanes, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*, *Assembly-Women*, *Wealth*, edited and translated by Stephen Halliwell, 297 pp., $85.00.

Euripides, *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Electra*, *Helen*, edited and translated by James Morwood, 218 pp., $85.00.

Herodotus, *The Histories*, translated by Robin Waterfield, 772 pp., $30.00.

[4] *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to The Peloponnesian War*, edited by Robert B. Strassler, Free Press, 711 pp., $45.00.

[5] *The Classical Greek Reader*, edited by Kenneth J. Atchity, Holt, 442 pp., $37.50.

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reading Homer seems unlikely to make so much as a dent in the way the Greeks are perceived these days by the American academic elite, who are, after all, the teachers of the next generation of readers. On that front, as Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath argue in *Who Killed Homer?: The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Wisdom*,[6] the predominant trends over the past 30 years or so have wreaked havoc.

True, Hanson and Heath admit, there is a long tradition in this country of resistance to the wisdom of the Greeks: Thomas Paine, Benjamin Franklin, and Noah Webster all judged the classics to be of scant use, and advocated that Americans receive, instead, a properly American education. But real doom for the classics came only with the upheavals of the 1960's, when it was decreed that any culture so sexist and militarist, so exploitative and chauvinist, simply had to go. In the 1980's and 1990's, "diversity" and multiculturalism finished the job that 60's revolutionism had begun.

Hanson and Heath, both of them professors of classics, are quick to indict their own profession for complicity in the doing-down of the ancients. It is bad enough, they write, that traditional philologists are pedantic beyond belief; much worse are the soul-killing acolytes of deconstructionist, Jungian, feminist, and homosexual theory. The fusty creatures of the old school sound like this:

> Whereas vocatival Achilles after the bucolic diaeresis demonstrates deliberate artistry rather than systematic composition, the hephthemimeral caesurea counters the idea of formulaic systems in another way.

And the fashionable nonsense sounds like this:

> The narrative of the Odyssey incorporates as a significant element of its ideological strategy a commentary on the construction and differentiation of gender. The text self-consciously employs control over narrative production itself.

If these are our designated proprietors of the Greek heritage, it is no wonder that Homer's voice no longer sings in the hearts of today's college students.

Hanson and Heath valiantly propose curriculum changes that would once again make Greek civilization the core of a liberal education. But their plan is hardly likely to get off the ground. Greek wisdom, as Thucydides says of war, is a harsh teacher, and merely to list its main tenets is to see how alien it is to the relativist and multiculturalist ethos of today. Among those tenets, as Hanson and Heath enumerate them, are the belief that there exist unchanging truths that men can understand and must live by; that life is a cruel affair, from which one should not expect justice; that culture is better than raw nature; and that some cultures are better than others. Hanson and Heath do their best to defend these ideas, and the Western civilization they fathered. Along the way they score many true and important points, not least among them the fact that, unlike most non-Western cultures even today, the Greeks invented, and practiced, self-criticism—perhaps "the most important legacy" they bequeathed to the West.

But the trouble with this defense is that it is, in brief, defensive; one feels the authors know that theirs is a losing game. Better simply to take one's side with those who still appear to find in the ancient books a never-failing source of insight into who we are and where we have come from. In doing so, we can even begin to do something that Hanson and Heath, in their zeal to defend Greek wisdom as a whole, fail adequately to do: namely, to be critical about it, discriminating among its varieties (and also among the forms in which it is expressed), and asking in which particular ways it is true.

WE CAN begin at the beginning, with Homer, whom no less an authority than Socrates acknowledges as *the* educator of Greece and foremost among the tragic poets. Of Homer himself, little is known; he may have come from Chios or Smyrna, and the best guess is that he wrote the *Iliad* some time between 725 and 675 B.C.E. A poem of nearly 16,000 lines, the *Iliad* is about the war the Greeks waged against the Trojans, and more specifically about the fate of Achilles, the greatest Greek hero, whose anger at an insult to his honor is the motive force of the story.

What, for Homer, is the truth about the human lot? Not to put too fine a point on it, the *Iliad* shows men who fight and die like beasts. Sometimes it is the greater falling upon the smaller and weaker—wolves bringing down sheep—and sometimes, as when Hector, the greatest Trojan hero, collides with Patroclus, Achilles' closest friend, it is like a lion tearing at a boar over a water hole. Although Homer does tend to honor each fallen fighter by name, not infrequently the deaths come so thick and fast that even he cannot keep the victims straight:

> These were the Argive captains Hector killed
> [and] then [he] went for the main mass
> like the West Wind battering soft shining clouds

[6] Free Press, 290 pp., $25.00.

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the South Wind wafts along—in deep
explosive blasts
it strikes and the great swelling waves roll on
and on
and the spray goes shooting up from under
the wind's hurl
swerving, roaring down the sea—so wildly
Hector routed
the packed lines of fighters caught in
his onslaught.
(translation by Robert Fagles)

To find Homer's equal for detailed carnage—he records where the fatal weapon enters the body, where it comes out, and what damage it does along the way, and he has an especially keen eye for the grotesquerie of violent death—one must look to the literature of World War I and the unrelenting gruesomeness of writers like Erich Maria Remarque, Henri Barbusse, or Wilfred Owen. Yet there is a crucial difference. In the moderns' view, the physical horror of warfare—and theirs was a more horrific war than Homer's—renders meaningless everything they went to war *for*. As Frederic Henry puts it in Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, "the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it." For Homer, the meaning of glory and sacrifice may flicker, but it is never extinguished.

Hanson and Heath contend that by the end of the *Iliad*, Achilles has been disabused of his love of glory. That would be very modern and enlightened of Achilles if it were true, but in fact it is not. In our very last glimpse of him in the *Iliad*, he is sleeping beside his beautiful slave-girl, Briseis—the very girl whose removal by the Greek commander Agamemnon brought on his famous anger in the first place. Now Achilles' prize has been restored, and he sleeps like a man given his due. More importantly, Achilles stays on to fight and—as he himself already knows—to die. Achilles will fall on the battlefield because he is a man of honor, and the *Iliad*, witness to his peerless glory as a soldier, is the most enduring monument he could have asked for.

Nietzsche came much closer to the Homeric essence in his essay "Homer's Contest," declaring that the Greeks, "the most humane men of ancient times, have a trait of cruelty, a tigerish lust to annihilate." Stripped of Homer's beguiling poetry, the Greek world reveals itself as one of brief, painful life and awful death. Inhuman nature is master here, and it is only by acknowledging this that, as Nietzsche wrote, one can find cause for rejoicing in human fate: "combat is salvation; the cruelty of victory is the pinnacle of life's jubilation." To this one need only add that, for the Greeks, the principle of strife was hardly limited to war. That life is above all a struggle, that men must contend incessantly for triumph over other men, was a truth that underlay the struggle of orator with orator, poet with poet, and philosopher with philosopher as much as it did soldier with soldier. The most sublime and civilized activities have their origins in the very feelings—jealousy, hatred, envy—that move men to kill and die.

EVEN AMONG the Greeks themselves, however, there were dissenters from this view. The Athenian tragedian Euripides (485-406 B.C.E.) did not exult at the Homeric depiction of war, though one can imagine him coveting the honor of replacing Homer's wisdom with his own. The plays Euripides wrote about the Trojan war and its aftermath—*The Trojan Women*, *Hecuba*, *Andromache*—were shaped by his understanding of a conflict more immediate than Homer's: the Peloponnesian War, which began in 431 B.C.E. and ended only in 404 with the defeat of Athens by Sparta. Euripides' plays measure the distance between the old stories and the realities of his own time; in his reading, Homer tends to fall far short of the truth.

In *The Suppliant Women*, for example, Theseus, king of Athens, asks Adrastus, king of Argos, to say a word about the bravery of the seven soldiers who led the Argive assault on Thebes and were killed in the attempt. "Only spare us, please," says Theseus, "the details":

It gets to be ludicrous,
naming names, telling who fought whom as
the battle heated,
or exactly where every spear-thrust left its
mark.
That kind of report's not worth a hill of beans.
To think that anyone actually in battle,
with the spearpoints right in his face or
whizzing by him,
could be fussy about detail, pinpointing
heroes!
I'd not have the nerve to ask, or trust for
a minute
anyone with gall enough to attempt an
answer.
(translation by John Frederick Nims)

What Theseus is deriding is just the sort of thing to which Homer devoted passage after rousing passage.

Even the gods come under Euripides' skeptical

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eye. At the end of *The Suppliant Women*, the sons of the dead Argive soldiers vow to avenge their fathers. Their understanding of what honor requires of them is endorsed by the goddess Athena herself, who appears *ex machina* at the end of the play to promise that the boys will grow up to sack Thebes. Their exploits in battle, she proclaims, will become "a theme for epic." But throughout the play, Euripides has already made his opinion of epic known: it is a bewitching lie, just as war itself is naked savagery hiding behind the sonorous and deceptive word, "honor."

Euripides was hardly the only Greek to subvert the traditional pieties at every chance he got. War was a subject for comedy, too, a form that for the Greeks possessed a wisdom of its own. "For what is true even comedy can tell," Dicaeopolis, the hero of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, avers as he launches into a tirade against Athens' war with Sparta.

In this play and in *Peace*, both the waging of war and the poetry of war are cast aside in favor of the delights of peace: the bounty of the earth, the comforts of the hearth, the joys of love. But it is in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes' most famous play about war, that the Homeric view really goes out the window. There, Athenian and Spartan women collude to wage a sex strike, denying their husbands intercourse until they call a halt to battle. Men's bodies, this play instructs, were made not to be pierced, hacked, and torn but rather to be warmed, caressed, and filled to the brim with the choicest food and wine. Aristophanes does not altogether discount the role of honor in war; but the wisdom he extols is the one that reminds men how they *really* ought to live.

ARISTOPHANES AND Euripides seem quite modern in their attitude to war and to life. But next to Thucydides (455-399 B.C.E.), they also seem quite limited. *The Peloponnesian War* is the greatest Greek history and one of the greatest works of history ever. Like most Greeks with noble aspirations, Thucydides measured himself against Homer, claiming a wisdom about humanity that the poet lacked. That wisdom shows itself to be fully alive to honor and glory, but at the same time to make room in its expansive view for the seemingly dishonorable and inglorious. In Thucydides, the high and the low exist side by side, neither of them distorted by the other's presence. Homer makes men want to go to war by exalting the pursuit of honor above all else (Alexander the Great, Plutarch wrote, slept with the *Iliad* and a dagger at the head of his bed); Euripides makes men hate war by despising honor as a fraud; Thucydides makes men accept war as an inescapable part of the way things are.

The episode in Thucydides most revealing in this regard is the notorious Melian dialogue. The island of Melos, a Spartan colony, had maintained neutrality in the war, refusing to submit to Athens as the other islands had done. In 416 the Athenians launched an expedition against Melos; to their surprise, the Melians fought back. Before undertaking any further violence, the Athenians sent envoys to talk things over.

In Thucydides' retelling, the envoys quickly get to the heart of the matter: they will eschew the usual pretense about the justice of their own case, and hope that the Melians for their part will not start bleating about their innocence, "since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must." The Athenians go on to prove their point, laying a siege that leads eventually to the Melians' surrender. Victorious, the Athenians promptly and savagely kill all the men, enslave the women and children, and repopulate Melos with colonists of their own.

Nothing the Athenians say or do to the Melians is dishonorable in their own eyes, or in those of Thucydides. It is rather the Melians' blindness, their preposterous nobility—against all reason they hold out, hoping to be rescued by the gods or the Spartans—that is judged to be irredeemably foolish. Athenian wisdom is the pitiless kind, the kind that enables you to survive and live triumphantly in a world where stupidity can render you quickly extinct. This is almost certainly what Nietzsche had in mind when he wrote of Thucydides' "unconditional will not to gull oneself, and to see reason in reality." Like Nietzsche himself, Thucydides is a powerful but dangerous thinker, one whose matchless and imperturbable talent for seeing things as they really are can sometimes make the reprehensible seem perfectly ordinary, even innocent.

BUT THIS, too, is not the final sum and substance of Greek wisdom. In Thucydides' account, the Athenians insist that in forcing the weaker to yield to their will, they are only doing the very thing the gods themselves do. But most men do not enjoy the privilege of imitating the gods; the more common fate is to submit to them.

The good that inheres in doing whatever the gods demand of one, and especially in enduring with reverent forbearance whatever suffering they bring, is a species of Greek wisdom best expressed

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in the tragedies of Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.E.) and Sophocles (495-405 B.C.E.). Learning obedience to the gods is not as simple as it sounds. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, a tragic cycle of retribution is brought to an end only by the intervention of Athena, who convenes a tribunal of Athenian citizens to judge the participants. Her instructions to the jurymen are very harsh—so harsh that David R. Slavitt, in his new translation of the *Oresteia*, shies away from conveying them in full. We need to go to Robert Fagles (though Richmond Lattimore's older translation would do as well) to get the true Greek flavor:

> Neither anarchy nor tyranny, my people.
> Worship the Mean, I urge you,
> shore it up with reverence and never
> banish terror from the gates, not outright.
> Where is the righteous man who
> knows no fear?
> The stronger your fear, your reverence for
> the just,
> the stronger your country's wall and city's
> safety.

At the heart of Athena's charge, and of Aeschylus' wisdom, is what Slavitt scoops out and throws away: the insistence that *fear* is indispensable to justice. It is not enough to be sensible, and it is not enough to be decent, and it is even not enough to be, in ordinary human terms, wise. One must also have awe.

In a different way, this is also the lesson brought home by the only other Greek tragedy more famous than the *Oresteia*, namely, Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Oedipus' wisdom, which enables him to solve the riddle of the murderous Sphinx, has made him what he is: the honored king of Thebes. But it will not save him from the clockwork mechanism that ticks off each inevitable moment on the way to his self-discovery and ruin. How the man who believed he was fleeing an unspeakable prediction encountered a belligerent stranger on the road from Corinth to Thebes, killed him, and then unknowingly married the dead man's widow is an exercise in the higher mathematics of earthly fate. But the real moral action depicted by the play is of a man's being granted a view of the mind of the gods, and being destroyed by the privilege.

And yet—to complete the picture—there were Greeks ready to contemplate this fearsome prospect, too, and unlike Oedipus they emerged with all their faculties intact. The late Allan Bloom once observed that a different sort of man who discovered he had done what Oedipus did might have responded not by putting out his own eyes but by remarking, "How about that? Small world, isn't it?" Such a response would be that of a man unspooked by the violation of even the most frightful taboos, and it may seem one that is hard to associate with the Greeks. Nevertheless, it is precisely the response a Greek philosopher might have made.

For these "lovers of wisdom," reason, after all, was the highest human faculty, and in practicing what they preached they regularly called into question the most cherished beliefs men lived by—which made philosophy a dicey business even in Athens, justly renowned as its home. The dichotomy of reason and revelation, famously expressed as the choice between Athens and Jerusalem, was also a choice within Athens itself, a city of philosophers and at the same time a city of adherents to time-honored beliefs.

Defending himself before the Athenian jury trying him for impiety and corruption of the young, Socrates (469-399 B.C.E.) compares himself to Achilles, greatest of Greek heroes. Like Achilles, Socrates is ready to brave death, for it would be shameful to abjure the life of philosophy even in the face of mortal danger. But Socrates' courage differs from Achilles', and is a far rarer thing. Achilles fears death, but does not yield to his fear, because to do so would be dishonorable; Socrates does not fear death in the first place, because to do so would be unreasonable. It is not given to us to know, he says, whether death is indeed the greatest evil or, on the contrary, the greatest good; since genuinely reasonable men must admit it might prove to be the latter, what is there to fear?

As long as he lives, Socrates affirms, he will continue to philosophize, and challenge his fellows to reconsider the lives they are leading:

> Best of men, you are Athenians, from the city that is greatest and best reputed for wisdom and strength: are you not ashamed that you care for having as much money as possible, and reputation, and honor, but that you neither care for nor give thought to prudence, and truth, and how your soul will be the best possible?
>
> (Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, translation by Thomas G. West and Grace Starry West)

To the philosopher, the manly life of action has nothing to rival the peaceful life given to contemplation and conversation. Thus does Socratic wisdom supersede Homeric honor and Sophoclean submissiveness at once.

Socrates' speech is one of the high points of Western civilization, just as the verdict against him

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is one of the lowest and saddest. Unlike Homer, whose wisdom he surpassed, Socrates did not have it in him to charm the multitude nor, though he managed to live pretty much as he pleased until the age of seventy, could he ultimately count on his wisdom to save his life when his fellow citizens determined to take it from him. Still, thanks principally to the memorial that Plato constructed in his dialogues, the life and death of Socrates have done more than anything else to ensure the timelessness of Greek philosophy, preeminent among so many noble works of mind and soul.

SUCH, AT LEAST, are the partial thoughts sparked by the latest crop of translations of Greek wisdom. But no discussion of this subject can end without acknowledging that, so far as Western civilization is concerned, the Greek achievement is not, after all, the only achievement, and the truths of the ancient Greeks are not the only truths by which we have been shaped. Nietzsche, a great admirer of the Hebrew Bible, wrote that "there are [in it] men, things, and speeches in so grand a style that Greek and Indian literature have nothing to compare with it." He was right.

For sheer ferocity, the Athenian campaign against Melos has its biblical counterpart in the Israelites' war against the Midianites described in Numbers 31. The Midianite women have enticed Israelite men to engage in whoredom and, still worse, to worship false gods. At the direction of Moses, the Israelites slay all the Midianite men, take all their women and children captive, seize all their animals and their goods, and burn all their cities to the ground. One might expect Moses to be pleased; but instead, when the victorious army presents itself to him, he erupts in anger, ordering the soldiers to slay, in addition, all the captive male children and all the women who have lain with men; the virgin girls the soldiers are to keep for themselves.

The appalling brutality of this brief war will be familiar ground to anyone acquainted with the battles described in *The Peloponnesian War*; and yet, most of the truly significant features of the biblical account are utterly alien to Thucydides. The Athenians make their way as reason dictates, though it is reason subordinate to their passion for honor and power; the Israelites' governing principle is obedience to the word of God, as revealed to them through Moses. To say that there is really no earthly reason why the Israelites should wage this war is not to say they do not have the very best of reasons. God Himself issues the command to go to war; the Israelites triumph because God is with them; the Midianites are punished for their wickedness in God's sight. In other words, the war is the work of divine justice, the Israelite army its appointed instrument.

One might discern here a certain parallel with the mental universe of Greek tragedy. But, quite apart from the figure of the one God, for Whom there is no real parallel among the Greeks, what are we to make of the figure of Moses? Even if one is shocked by his evident cruelty in this episode, no man in Thucydides, or even in Homer, approaches him in stature. Moses does not need to see his greatness reflected in other men's eyes, or to make his name resound down the centuries (although of course he gets that, too). He makes honor seem a trifling affair, and as for knowledge of the world, his easily dwarfs that of Odysseus, Nestor, Pericles, Themistocles, and for that matter of Homer and Thucydides. Any man would want to know the world as Moses knows it: from God's mouth, to his ear. Heroic without longing to be, unrivaled in magnificence because without feelings of rivalry, Moses has been chosen by God, and that is enough.

Obedience to God is rarely blind in the Bible—not a matter, as it is in Greek tragedy, simply of accepting one's fate. As extraordinary as is *Oedipus the King*, the Book of Job is more terrifying still, dramatically more penetrating, and finally wiser.[7] Oedipus, the Greek tragic hero, and Job, the biblical sufferer, are two distinct human types. Upon realizing that he has inadvertently killed his father and married his mother, Oedipus bewails his fate, but he is also unprotesting, accepting what the gods have given him though it means they hate him more than any other man on earth. Even in *Oedipus at Colonus*, which Sophocles wrote some twenty years later and in which Oedipus asserts that he suffered through no fault of his own, it does not occur to him to demand a divine explanation. Oedipus is impelled to his doom by a need to know the truth—that is, by a need to know what happened. He does not ask why it happened, and neither does Sophocles.

Job, by contrast, aches to know why; like Abraham long before him, he demands an accounting. The worst part of his suffering comes from incomprehension, from knowing that his fate is not, in fact, just. No Greek tragedy equals the Book of Job in its understanding of the relentless anguish of

[7] The Book of Job has just appeared in a new translation, together with introduction and notes, by Raymond P. Scheindlin, Norton, 237 pp., $23.95.

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mind that human loss or physical pain can induce. Job is reduced to a state in which his most urgent need is to know more than a man can ever hope to know: why life should be as it is, rather than what he thought it to be.

True, when at last God appears to Job in the whirlwind, He never answers the questions Job has asked. What Job learns instead is that an explanation for the problem of evil—and in particular for the evil that strikes the man who is without blemish—is not the wisdom he needs. The wisdom he needs, paradoxically, is that he cannot know everything. It is the Lord's majestic apparition—and, for majesty, there is again nothing to equal it in Greek literature—that settles Job's troubled mind and allows him to go on living in the world without demanding to know things that belong to the mind of God alone.

Finally, as Socrates is the wisest of the Greeks, so Solomon is the wisest among the men of the Hebrew Bible. There is plenty of wisdom in Proverbs, Solomon's compendium, though most of it is admittedly of the proverbial sort. The apothegm that best encapsulates it, though, is something again reminiscent of Greek tragedy, and in particular of Athena's admonition at the end of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*: "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility."

Here is that ancient fear again: a relic of primitive unpleasantness that enlightened moderns prefer not to think about. It is one of the two emotions evoked by Greek tragedy (the other is pity), and it is also what Socrates' philosophy sets out to expose as nothing but a phantom. Solomon, however, avers that without fear there *is* no wisdom: one's soul must tremble naked before the Lord. And then he adds a parallel point about honor: it is not something to be seized brazenly by men sure of their own greatness, in battle or in any other pursuit, but rather to be earned in good time by men humble before God and their fellows.

Neither the wisdom of Athens nor that of Jerusalem is monolithic. There is wisdom and there is wisdom, and then there is always some other kind of wisdom. In reading these old books, one must turn upon them all the power of understanding one possesses, and even after one has understood them one must still choose among them and between them, and choose wisely. It is a pity that in this great task, our universities, official repositories of our own wisdom, are of so little help. But for those willing to read them there are always the books themselves, and even in our befuddled times they still retain their primordial urgency, their undying power to move the mind and shake the soul.

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OBSERVATIONS

Equilibrium, Mental and Mathematical

Jeremy Bernstein

AMONG MATHEMATICIANS and theoretical physicists there can sometimes be a continuum of weird behavior that ranges from the profoundly eccentric to the truly mentally disturbed. To set the parameters, here are two cases: Wolfgang Pauli and Isaac Newton.

Pauli, who was born in Vienna in 1900 and died in Zurich in 1958, was one of the most distinguished theorists of quantum physics. He was also incredibly eccentric—identical, as J. Robert Oppenheimer once remarked, to his caricature. He had a massive head that bobbed rhythmically either up and down or back and forth, and he sometimes muttered to himself. Anyone who did not know who he was would have difficulty making sense of the scene I am about to describe.

At one point in 1957, rumors reached us at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, where I was then a fellow, that Pauli and Werner Heisenberg had found a "Theory of Everything." For Pauli to be smitten by such a theory meant that one had better look into it, since he was an acerbic and brilliant critic of scientific ideas. In January 1958, Pauli gave a lecture on his revelation at Columbia, and many of us came in to hear him. After the talk was over, Niels Bohr, then also at the Institute for Advanced Study, was asked if he would like to comment, but before Bohr could say anything Pauli volunteered that the theory might seem somewhat crazy. In fact, Bohr retorted, the trouble was that (unlike, presumably, quantum physics) it did not seem crazy enough.

By now, Bohr had gotten out of his seat in the front row and had begun to circulate around the long table before the blackboard on which Pauli had been writing. Pauli followed him. Each time one of them reached the front of the table, he would repeat his lines, Pauli protesting that the theory was crazy, Bohr responding that it was not crazy enough. It occurred to me even then that someone wandering in might be prompted to have these two titans of 20th-century physics committed to the nearest asylum. Of course, Pauli, to say nothing of Bohr, was not mad at all.

And Newton? I would imagine that, like Pauli, the young Newton, the Newton of the "miracle year" 1666, when he made most of his great discoveries, must have seemed profoundly eccentric. His amanuensis, one Humphrey Newton (no relation), noted that he had heard Newton laugh only once (when asked of what use the study of Euclid might be), and his doctor, Richard Mead, would later disclose to Voltaire that Newton had died a virgin. But around 1693, when he was in his early fifties, Newton had a true breakdown, complete with paranoid delusions that his friends were plotting against him. In a letter to the diarist Samuel Pepys later that year, he wrote he "neither ate nor slept well this twelve month, nor have my former consistency of mind."

As this passage suggests, Newton was already recovered sufficiently to acknowledge that he had been ill. But only a few days afterward he would send to the philosopher John Locke one of the most remarkable documents in the entire

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Newtonian canon. Here is the pertinent part:

> Being of the opinion that you endeavoured to embroil me with woemen & by other means I was so much affected with it as that when one told me you were sickly & would not live I answered twere better if you were dead. I desire you to forgive me this uncharitableness. . . . I beg your pardon also for saying or thinking that there was a designe to sell me an office, or to embroile me.

BETWEEN THE cases of Pauli and Newton there is, as I say, a continuum, with many points along the way. The 19th-century mathematician Georg Cantor, to whom we owe much of our understanding of mathematical infinities, suffered, from the age of forty on, depressions that were so deep that he often spent time in sanitoria. More recently there is the example of Kurt Gödel, one of whose great contributions to mathematics, ironically, concerned a problem on which Cantor had worked unsuccessfully; Gödel's mental state, for much of his adult life, was unstable, and as he grew older he became more paranoid, finally refusing medical help because he thought the doctors were plotting against him.* And now we have the case of the mathematician and Nobel Prize-winner John Nash, still very much alive and the subject of a new biography, *A Beautiful Mind*, by Sylvia Nasar.†

Nash was born on June 13, 1928 in Bluefield, West Virginia. His father, John Sr., had studied electrical engineering and worked his entire professional life for the Appalachian Power Company, so John Jr. grew up in an environment congenial to science. Curiously for someone later so gifted in math, Nash showed no apparent precociousness. But at age thirteen or fourteen he read *Men of Mathematics*, a wonderful book for young people by Eric Temple Bell, and it generated in him the ambition to be the first person to prove Fermat's Last Theorem. In his senior year in high school, Nash entered the Westinghouse science competition and won a college scholarship. (From Nasar's account it seems that his project was done jointly with his father; I was not aware that this was allowed.)

Nash used his scholarship to attend the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, where he studied to become a chemical engineer and so impressed his professors that he was given his choice among the best graduate schools in the country. By this time, he had decided to become a mathematician. He selected Princeton mainly because it offered a somewhat larger stipend than Harvard, though the fact is that Princeton had a superb mathematics department of its own and was next door to the Institute for Advanced Study, whose faculty at the time included both Gödel and John von Neumann.

Nash arrived at Princeton in 1948, four years after von Neumann and the economist Oskar Morgenstern had published their seminal book, *The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. Game theory was probably a more active subject at Princeton than anywhere else at the time, and Nash became interested in it. Indeed, in 1950 he wrote his Ph.D. thesis—all 27 pages of it—in this field. What he said there is a subject to which I will return.

Although he had hoped to remain at Princeton, Nash was not offered a job; instead, he accepted an instructorship at MIT, then in the process of building up its mathematics department. By the time he moved to Cambridge, he had already spent a summer as a consultant at the RAND corporation, the defense think tank in Santa Monica, California. Two years later, while again consulting at RAND, Nash probably entered into his first homosexual relationship, but then, on his return to MIT in the fall, he began an affair with a somewhat older woman named Eleanor Stier.

Nash had no intention of marrying Eleanor, and he showed little interest in the son, John David Stier, who was born to them in 1953. In the summer of 1954 he was arrested for indecent exposure in a men's bathroom in Santa Monica. This cost him his security clearance at RAND, and he never again worked for the government, though he kept his job at MIT and there were no other adverse consequences.

His sex life aside, Nash's behavior was becoming noticeably peculiar. But the MIT faculty already boasted Norbert Wiener, one of the great eccentrics of all time, and Nash may have seemed relatively normal by comparison. Certainly Alicia Larde, one of the few coeds at MIT in the 1950's, thought so when she fell in love with Nash and, after an erratic courtship—which included a very emotional encounter with Nash's former mistress Eleanor Stier—married him in early 1957. What exactly she knew about Nash's ambivalent sexuality—he had had another homosexual liaison in the summer of 1956—is not clear.

BY 1959, Nash had crossed over the boundary from deep eccentricity to serious mental illness. For the next 30 years, he was in and out of mental institutions, diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia, and for all practical purposes had disappeared from the world. But then, starting in the late 1980's, he began to undergo a seemingly spontaneous remission.

For the past years he had been living once again in Princeton. Jobless, he led a kind of ghostly existence, leaving strange if nonthreatening messages on blackboards. Very few people knew who he was. But in the fall of 1989 a young Swedish economist named Jörgen Weibull paid a visit to the Princeton campus and enlisted the chairman of the mathematics department to help him persuade Nash to have lunch. The chairman may or may

* See my article, "Gödel's Universe," in the September 1997 COMMENTARY.

† Simon & Schuster, 459 pp., $25.00.

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not have known the reason for the visit—Nash certainly did not.

Weibull was representing the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, and had been charged with finding out whether Nash's mental health was sturdy enough to withstand the rigors of being awarded a Nobel Prize in economics. It seems that his 27-page Ph.D. thesis had become, by now, an essential element of mathematical economic analysis. In October 1994—Weibull having apparently decided that Nash was no stranger than other Princeton mathematicians he had encountered—it was announced that Nash was to share the Nobel Prize in economics with Reinhard Selten and John Harsanyi.

IN READING Sylvia Nasar's extraordinarily moving narrative, I found myself haunted. I am two years younger than Nash, but we seem to have traced many of the same routes. In 1951, when Nash arrived at MIT, I was finishing my senior year as a mathematics major at Harvard, and many of the people Nasar mentions were my teachers or colleagues. In particular, Marvin Minsky, one of the founders of artificial intelligence, had just returned to Harvard from Princeton, where he had been a contemporary of Nash.

Minsky, who is mentioned frequently in Nasar's book, was one of those who never deserted Nash even in his darkest days. He recently told me that while at Princeton he had become stuck on a theorem he needed for his thesis; Nash gave him a suggestion that seemed to have nothing to do with the theorem but turned out to be the key to proving it. He also told me an amusing anecdote. Several of the graduate students in mathematics used to frequent a restaurant in Princeton. When the service was really bad, Nash would wait until the pooled tip money was on the table and then pocket some of it. He called this maneuver a "negative tip." "But that's our money!" his companions would protest. "No it isn't," Nash would reply. "It's her money now." Forty years later, when the Nobel Prize was awarded in economics, Minsky decided that Nash's was the correct position.

The mathematician George Mackey, who used to visit Nash after he was committed to McLean Hospital outside Boston in 1959, was one of my first great teachers. According to Nasar, Mackey once asked Nash how he could believe that extraterrestrials were sending him messages—to which Nash replied, "Because the ideas I had about supernatural beings came to me the same way that my mathematical ideas did. So I took them seriously." Still another figure in Nasar's story is Richard Palais, a professor of mathematics at Brandeis who found Nash a temporary job there in 1965; he was one of my roommates in graduate school.

IT IS to Nasar's credit that she was able to interview so many of the mathematicians who knew Nash at various times in his life. But it is a pity she did not get one of them to review her manuscript. As an economics correspondent for the *New York Times*, she is qualified to write about that side of Nash, but mathematics is something else again. Let me cite two examples, not very important in themselves but symptomatic of a serious defect in this book.

In describing the ambiance at MIT when Nash was first getting to know his future wife Alicia, Nasar quotes a woman named Emma Duchane who was a physics major at the time. Duchane: "We wanted intellectual thrills. When my boyfriend told me *e* equals *I* to the *PI* minus 1, I was thrilled. I felt the absolute joy of the idea." Insofar as I can make any sense of this statement—the first *I* should presumably be *i*, the square root of -1, and *PI* presumably stands for π—it is false. Perhaps Duchane's boyfriend was putting her on, or perhaps he told her the correct formula—"*e* to the (π times *i*) =-1"—and Nasar mistranscribed it. In either case, the formula happens to encapsulate some of the most fundamental ideas in mathematics.

Equally false is the statement a few pages later that, "in formulating his special theory of relativity," Einstein employed the non-Euclidean geometry of the 19th-century German mathematician Bernhard Riemann. The special theory of relativity, which Einstein created in 1905, has nothing to do with Riemann's geometry; it takes place in a flat Euclidean world. Only in the general theory of relativity and gravitation, which Einstein published in 1916, does non-Euclidean geometry become relevant.

These mathematical howlers show an unfamiliarity with Nash's intellectual world that is significant for Nasar's thesis in *A Beautiful Mind*. Mathematicians are assuredly very intelligent, especially if intelligence is defined as that which mathematicians do well—namely, abstract thought. If one is not accustomed to their mental universe, however, it is easy to get the impression that every mathematician is a "genius." That is what seems to have happened with Nasar: everyone she writes about appears to be a genius. The result is that the whole notion of genius becomes dumbed-down.

This makes it all the more difficult than it already is to classify John Nash as a mathematician. For all intents and purposes, his career in the field stopped when he was thirty, and the last thing he was working on—a conjecture in number theory by Riemann—has, to this day, not been proved. From Nasar's account, it would appear that Nash's breakdown was beginning to make itself mani-fest in his almost desperate approach to this problem. True, the work he had done in the brief period of his active research—during his whole career he published only some twenty papers—was truly first-rate; but how can you compare it with what a Gödel or a von Neumann

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managed to do even before they were thirty?

BUT THEN there is the other side of Nash. In preparing this piece, I did something I thought I would never do in my life: I bought a textbook in economics. It is called *Game Theory with Economic Applications*, by H. Scott Bierman and Luis Fernandez, and it was published in 1993, the year before Nash won his Nobel Prize. I wanted to see if what Nash had done in his Ph.D. thesis had indeed entered the mainstream of economic theory, and I also wanted a somewhat more technical and more detached account than the one Nasar offers in her book.

One thing for sure is that Nash's work has become a textbook subject. In fact, my textbook has two long and pivotal chapters called "Nash Equilibrium I" and "Nash Equilibrium II." I also note that in the 1965 edition of the *Enyclopaedia Britannica*, the excellent entry on game theory includes a paragraph on Nash equilibrium—making it clear that, while Nash himself had vanished by that year, his work was very much in the air.

Let me now attempt, with many apologies to the experts, a brief explanation of what Nash did. The analysis of strategies for playing games—at least games whose rules can be formalized mathematically—goes back a long way. But modern theory starts with the work that von Neumann first embarked upon in the late 1920's. His analysis dealt basically with two-person, zero-sum, noncooperative games that are subject to clearly specified rules. Zero-sum means that one player's loss is necessarily the other's gain; noncooperative means that the players do not enter into binding agreements with each other before the game starts.

The strategy of a noncooperative game evolves as a function of what happens while the game is being played. Von Neumann proved what is known as a "minimax theorem." Suppose there are two players, Mary and Tom—my textbook likes the names Mary and Tom—and they are playing such a game. Mary wants to choose a strategy that will maximize her gain, taking into account the fact that Tom is smart enough to see through this strategy and to counter with one of his own designed to minimize Mary's gain. So Mary will look for a strategy that will minimize the damage that Tom can do—or, in other words, that will maximize Tom's chances of doing minimum damage. Conversely, Tom will look for a strategy that will minimize the losses that Mary can inflict.

What von Neumann showed was that for this class of games, such a strategy must exist. (Finding it in any given game is another matter entirely.) It was this theorem that became the basis of von Neumann and Morgenstern's 1944 book. Not much more progress was made in game theory until 1950, when Nash entered the picture.

Part of Nash's contribution was to allow one to relax the assumptions of von Neumann's theorem; the game does not have to be zero-sum or involve only two players. But he went beyond that to change the paradigm altogether. Let me revert to an example from my textbook. In a given community there are two automobile dealers—the textbook calls them Honest Ava and Trusty Rusty—each selling the same kind of automobile. Between them, they have a lock on the market. But they are not allowed to cooperate. Suppose, nevertheless, that they want to set prices.

In this "game," the sellers have three possible price levels to choose from: high, medium, and low. At what level should the prices be set so as to produce a situation that will both maximize each seller's profits and be "stable"—that is, so that the prices, once having been set, will not have to be immediately reset in response to some defensive action on the part of the other seller? If there is such a strategy, it is called a Nash equilibrium, and if a Nash equilibrium is reached, then everyone will have done the best that can be done.

Crucial to this discussion is that each competitor act in a rational way to maximize his or her benefit. But remember that Ava and Rusty cannot collude; if they could, both would set their prices as high as possible and the story would be over. Here, in my reconstruction, is how Ava would reason: "If I set my price high and Rusty acts rationally, he will lower his price to medium. But in turn he will reason that *I* will act rationally, and set my price low in response to him. Hence, setting my price high will not lead to an equilibrium." If one follows Ava—and Rusty, too—through the rest of the reasoning procedure, one sees that the only equilibrium solution is for both of them to set their prices low from the beginning: a wonderful arrangement, incidentally, for the consumer.

This was Nash's basic insight. What he showed was that in a very wide range of such "games," there must be at least one such strategy leading to equilibrium, and if there are several, one must decide among them. His theorem is nonconstructive in the same sense as von Neumann's—that is, it tells us that an equilibrium strategy exists, but not how to find one. Perhaps that is why, according to Sylvia Nasar, von Neumann was dismissive when Nash went to him with his result.

But it is at least as likely that, six years after publication of his work with Morgenstern, von Neumann had lost interest in the subject. Indeed, by 1950 von Neumann had become deeply involved in creating the first modern electronic computers. Today, we have both the computer and Nash's equilibrium theory, and both are used routinely by economists.

TO ME, one of the most fascinating parts of Nasar's book concerns the

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machinations that went into securing Nash's Nobel award. I have some first-hand experience at this kind of investigation, having once tried to trace the story of the 1944 solo prize to Otto Hahn for the discovery of fission. What was curious here was that Hahn's work had been done in collaboration with Fritz Strassmann, and correctly interpreted by Lise Meitner and Otto Frisch, yet none of these other figures was recognized. Despite the lapse of the 50-year rule of silence surrounding the Nobel committee's proceedings, I got nowhere. But Nasar has the whole messy tale.

As it happens, the Nobel Prize in economics is financed not by the Nobel Foundation but by the Central Bank of Sweden. In other words, the money does not come out of Alfred Nobel's will. But the prize is nevertheless administered by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the Nobel Foundation. By 1994, a good deal of opposition had developed to the idea of a "Nobel" in economics altogether, with some scientists feeling it diluted the significance of their own prizes. This became part of the politics behind the award. The other, countervailing, part was that 1994 marked the 50th anniversary of von Neumann and Morgenstern's book, and was hence an auspicious date for bestowing a prize in game theory.

Then there was the matter of Nash himself. Not only had he done nothing in the field for 40 years, but, as one of the committee members argued, he had been a consultant at the RAND corporation, and *they worked on bombs there*. (By this criterion, a great many physicists, from Richard Feynman on down, should have been denied the prize.) Nash's history of mental instability was another source of concern, and various alternative candidates were suggested even after Jörgen Weibull had vouched for him. In the end, Nash was chosen, but by a narrow vote. What the prize meant to him can only be imagined.

BUT THIS brings me to a final topic: Nash's recovery. To Dr. Oliver Sacks, the well-known specialist in mental disorder with whom I was able to have a brief conversation about Nash's case, what was crucial was that after his breakdown, Nash enjoyed a supportive environment. (It is also fortunate, I think, that during his hospital stays he was not subjected to electric-shock treatments, then still at a relatively unadvanced stage of development.)

Nash and his wife Alicia were divorced in 1962, three years after his commitment to McLean Hospital. He spent much of the following two years in the Carrier Clinic in New Jersey. After another six years of desultory wandering (including his failed stint teaching at Brandeis), he returned to Princeton in 1970. By then he had nowhere else to go. Motivated by pity, love, and perhaps hope, his ex-wife let him move back in with her, and to this day he still lives with her although they have never remarried. John Charles Nash, the son to whom Alicia had given birth in 1959, was also part of the household that Nash returned to in 1970.

This was when Nash first began haunting the Princeton campus. Here again he was fortunate. No one harassed him, and he was even given free access to the Princeton mainframe computer. At first he seemed to be using it to continue the rather crazy numerology he had been engaged in—"making names out of numbers and being worried by what he found," as Hal Trotter, who saw Nash nearly every day at the computer center, has put it to Nasar. But then "gradually," according to Trotter, "that went away," and what followed "was more mathematical numerology. Playing with formulas and factoring. It wasn't coherent math research, but it had lost its bizarre quality. Later it was real research." Nash was getting well.

No one can say whether his present remission is permanent; one can only hope so. But what is almost unbearably sad is that his son John Charles, brilliant in his own right, has inherited the same sort of mental illness that beset his father and has already had it for a larger fraction of his life. Most of Nash's energies are now taken up trying to help his crippled son.

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My Days With Frieda Lawrence

Walter Berns

Wind whispers through the pinon trees dotting the 160-acre mountaintop ranch that inspired writer D.H. Lawrence. . . . The scene is peaceful, yet melancholy: the property . . . is falling apart.

Washington Times, March 27, 1998

IT WAS a lovely place, that ranch, near (but not at) the top of a mountain a few miles from Taos, New Mexico, and so inaccessible that no one was likely to come upon it inadvertently. My wife and I spent our honeymoon at the ranch in 1951, when Lawrence's widow Frieda still owned it, although she no longer lived there. We were alone, except when Frieda and Angie would come up from Taos for lunch or dinner; Angie was Angelo Ravagli, the model for the gamekeeper Mellors in Lawrence's most famous novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928), and soon to become Frieda's husband. Alone, my wife and I could sit on the wooden steps of the "big house" and look over the sagebrushed desert spread out below us, with the Rio Grande visible—and in that clear air almost always visible—in the distance. And we could walk for hours along the crude aqueduct the Indians had constructed to carry water to the ranch and to the concrete swimming pool (built by Angie) in which we could swim, naked as jaybirds. It was a perfect place for a honeymoon.

The ranch had been owned by Mabel Dodge, a pretentious New Yorker with lots of money who came to Taos, married a local Indian named Tony Luhan (whom I never heard utter a word), and settled in to become a patroness of the arts. The Lawrences acquired it from her in exchange for the manuscript of Lawrence's early masterpiece, *Sons and Lovers* (1913). I do not know what Mabel did with the manuscript, but Frieda, sole proprietor after Lawrence's death in 1930, left the ranch to the University of New Mexico, which, as the story in the *Washington Times* informs us, has allowed it to "decline from asset to eyesore."

I FIRST met Frieda in 1946 at the Sagebrush Inn outside Taos, where, with a friend from my wartime Navy days, I was working as a waiter and she had come to dine. That meeting led to an invitation to tea at her Taos home, and then to a visit, the first of many, at the ranch. There, usually at supper, she would ask the two of us about the Navy and the war, and, in return, speak of her "wonderful days with Lawrence," of his precarious health, of his difficulties with publishers and editors, of their life together in Germany, Italy, the south of France, Australia, and in England during World War I, when she, born Frieda von Richthofen and a cousin of the "Red Baron" Manfred von Richthofen, had been suspected of being a German spy.

And she also spoke of her childhood at Metz in the Lorraine, where, during the German annexation of that territory after the Franco-Prussian war, her father, a German nobleman, had served in some official capacity. Sitting on the wall surrounding his estate, she and her two sisters would toss pears and apples from their orchard to the soldiers marching by. In the French convent school where she "did not

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learn very much," one or another of the nuns would say, as she came dashing into class in her Hessian boots, "*Toujours doucement, ma petite Frieda.*"

She was not petite when I knew her. In fact, she was rather lumpy and could have been mistaken for a peasant as she walked around in her bare feet and apron, feeding the chickens, answering questions with a throaty German "*Ja!*" (or, when speaking with Angie, "*Si!*"), and roaring with laughter when she came upon a laundry list prepared by Angie that included, among the items, "4 shits." Still, there was also something of royalty about her. Once, when a self-important Texas visitor to the ranch was bragging about his ancestors, Frieda replied, "Mine were Silesian kings." And so they were.

Her younger sister Johanna (Nusch, as Frieda called her) had been lady-in-waiting to the empress queen of Kaiser Wilhelm II, and once, by way of declaring a love affair at an end, had slipped off a pearl necklace given her by her suitor and casually dropped it into the Spree (or Seine, Tiber, or Thames). To hear Frieda tell it, Nusch had had lovers everywhere, even (but not in her salad days) in Hot Springs, Arkansas. This, because it says something of importance about Frieda, is a tale worth repeating.

In 1949, on Frieda's seventieth birthday, Nusch, at least sixty-five but doing a good job of concealing it, came to the ranch and announced that she had stopped at Hot Springs on the way and had met a "nice young man" there. Indeed, she continued, she had invited him to come to Taos and—hoping her sister would not mind—had told him that Frieda was her mother. Frieda found this hilarious; she warned me not to give the game away.

AFTER LUNCH on most days, Frieda would retire to her bedroom to read and take a brief nap, emerging with her impressions of what she had read. Writers, for her, were divided between those who had "*zut*" and those who did not. Somehow one knew what she meant—or at least I did, since in those days I was planning to become a writer myself. Nietzsche had "*zut*," according to Frieda, and of course Lawrence had it in abundance; but Aldous Huxley, though she loved him dearly, did not. She loved to read Lawrence's poems aloud, and subsequently recorded them; I have a copy of the recording still. A room in the "big house" was filled with his paintings, one of which showed a group of nuns looking furtively at a naked shepherd boy asleep under a tree.

Frieda enjoyed playing the piano, especially if we sang along with her; her specialty was a folk song that had been a favorite among the German soldiers at Metz, "*Wenn ich zu meinem Kinde geh*" ("When I go to my child"). Considering the fact that no tuner had ever braved the rutted road to the ranch, the piano was in surprisingly good condition. Frieda was not the only one who thought so; to cite an even better authority, Leonard Bernstein did, too, and in my presence.

Bernstein visited the ranch during the summer of 1948 because Frieda had invited the poet Stephen Spender to spend some time there, and along with Spender came Bernstein and Bernstein's younger brother. For some reason, Frieda owned the complete score of Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni*, and, seeing it, Bernstein immediately sat down and began to play and sing his way through it. I thought this extraordinary at the time, but Frieda, who had spent the better part of her life among unusually talented people, took it in stride. As I recall, Spender's crew lasted only a week, probably because, alone up there, they got tired of cooking for themselves or, in Bernstein's case, of having to do without the news from New York.

FRIEDA MADE it a practice to take fresh flowers and cedar and pine boughs to the tiny chapel where Lawrence's ashes were buried—the *Washington Times* story refers to the place as a mausoleum. Angie, an expert mason, had built the chapel, and Georgia O'Keefe, who lived not far away and was a great friend of Frieda's, had painted one of the pictures that hung in it. Famous people from around the world had entered their names in the registry that Frieda kept there.

There are interesting stories involving the chapel, but to tell one of them I have to introduce another inhabitant of Frieda's world, the Honorable Dorothy Brett, daughter of the Viscount Esher (confidant of King Edward VII) and sister of the ranee of Sarawak (now a part of Malaysia but, before World War II, ruled by Sir Charles Vyner Brooke, the ranee's husband and the third and last of the rajahs). Brett was a painter, and a rather good one, too. She lived in Taos across the road from Frieda, popping in on her at least once a day. She was therefore well placed to inform Mabel Dodge what Frieda was doing, and—of greatest interest to Mabel—what famous person (for instance, the poet William Carlos Williams) had visited Frieda without coming to visit *her*. To say the least, Mabel was jealous of Frieda and, beyond that, had persuaded herself that she better appreciated Lawrence's genius and would make a better custodian of his ashes.

Lawrence had died in the south of France, and some years before my time in Taos, Frieda and Angie had gone there to recover the ashes. Arriving home, they were greeted by Brett, who asked, "Where's Lawrence?" It turned out that on their return to Taos they had stopped for a cup of coffee, and the ashes had been left on the counter. (Angie was dispatched to fetch them.) This proved the last straw for Mabel. Inviting Frieda and Angie to dinner, she instructed her

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husband Tony and some friends of his from the Indian pueblo at Taos to go up to the chapel and steal the ashes. They probably would have succeeded had Brett, who was privy to the plot, not warned Frieda at the last moment.

In 1949, persuaded—by Frieda, among others—that I would never be a writer (I lacked "*zut*"), I left Taos for graduate school and became, of all things, a political scientist. Frieda died in 1956, Brett in 1975. As for Angie, the last time my wife and I saw him was in 1966 on our way to Portofino in Italy. He had returned to his native Spotorno, near Genoa, but it was sadly obvious that he no longer belonged there and had nothing to do. Of course, without Frieda and the world she had built around her, he would have had nothing to do in Taos, either.

And the ranch? I suspect that, after consulting some smart lawyers and developers, the University of New Mexico will turn it into still another of the area's ski resorts. What they would do with the chapel is a problem, though; it is too small for a bar, and a ski resort is no place for a shrine.

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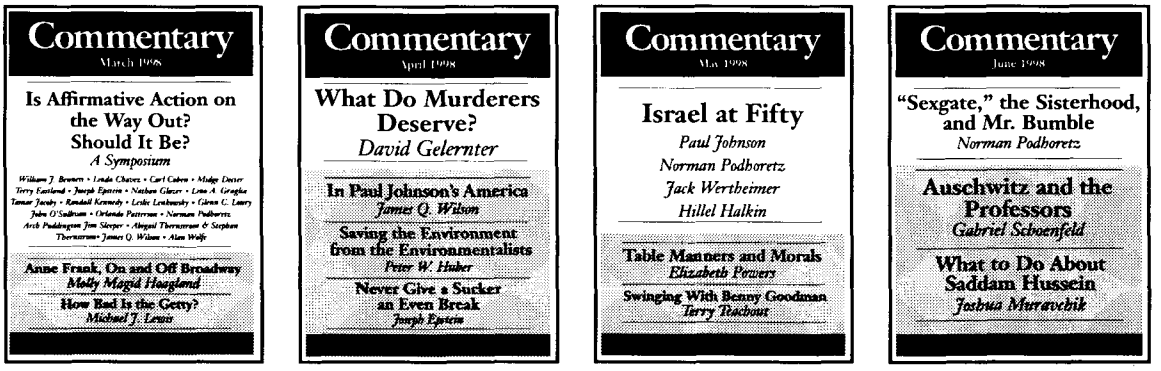

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Books in Review

Diplomat

To End a War
by Richard Holbrooke
Random House. 408 pp. $27.95

Reviewed by
Aleksa Djilas

"YOU HAVE a friend in Pennsylvania," license plates in the former Quaker colony used to proclaim. "I want to have many friends in Washington" could be the motto of Richard Holbrooke's *To End a War*, a detailed account of his efforts to bring Bosnia's Muslims, Serbs, and Croats to sign the 1995 Dayton peace accords.

If one is to believe the former Assistant Secretary of State for Europe, now America's ambassador-designate to the United Nations, virtually everyone in the Clinton White House, State Department, Pentagon, and every other relevant government agency is either a "friend" or an "old friend." In his acknowledgments, Holbrooke proudly claims indebtedness to over 100 politicians, journalists, diplomats, admirals, scholars, generals, and others. His gratitude extends above all to those with whom he disagreed or encountered difficulties of one sort or another. Although nothing could be more evident in this book than Bill Clinton's lack of interest and initiative throughout the Bosnian conflict, Holbrooke sets the President upon the highest pedestal.

Samuel Johnson declared ambition to be a "noble passion." Ambitious Holbrooke famously is, and, as his liberal use of flattery suggests, he can politick with the best of them. But noble? In *To End a War* he projects himself as unfailingly flexible and unfailingly resourceful, not to speak of strong-willed and persistent. Other adjectives spring to mind with equal plausibility in the course of reading this book: imperious and peremptory are just two. But the truth is hard to get at, because Holbrooke as painted by Holbrooke is essentially a two-dimensional figure. When things go well, he is happy; when things fail to go well, he is unhappy but resolute. When meetings run long and time in bed is short, he feels tired. And when three American colleagues (to whom his book is dedicated) perish on a mountain road outside Sarajevo, he feels sad—although not interested enough in the French driver and three French soldiers who were also in the vehicle to mention their fate.

The real question, in any event, has to do not with Holbrooke's self-presentation but with his moral and diplomatic convictions. In Bosnia, so far as one can tell, these were either nonexistent or completely dependent on the situation of the moment. He tells us, for example, that he "simply hated" the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and the Serbian military commander Ratko Mladic, both of whom had been indicted for war crimes, and he refused to shake hands or to sit down with either one of them. On the other hand, he enjoyed a rapport with Serbia's president, Slobodan Milosevic, got along well with Croatia's president, Franjo Tudj-

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man, and seems to have been intimate enough with Bosnia's Muslim president, Alija Izetbegovic, to refer to him as "Izzy."

Why the discrepancy? After all, as he acknowledges, Milosevic bore the heaviest responsibility for the war; Tudjman wanted to make Croatia ethnically pure; and Izetbegovic, a devout Muslim, paid only lip service to the principles of a multiethnic state and was no democrat. But the reasons behind Holbrooke's moral calculus are not far to seek: all three of these men were willing to accommodate him in his diplomatic maneuverings.

No less clear is what they got in return. When, in 1992, the then-Secretary of State, Lawrence Eagleburger, demanded the creation of an international tribunal to prosecute war criminals, Milosevic's name was first on the list of those to be tried. Carl Bildt, the former prime minister of Sweden who served as the European Union's peace envoy in Bosnia, later accused Tudjman, too, of war crimes in connection with the mass killings of Serbian civilians. Holbrooke himself, in a January 1993 memorandum to Warren Christopher and Anthony Lake, then about to assume the offices, respectively, of Secretary of State and National Security Adviser, recommended that the U.S. "brand certain individuals war criminals." Yet neither Milosevic nor Tudjman has ever been indicted.

By 1995, Tudjman's army was busy expelling Serbs from Croatia and western Bosnia as the Bosnian Serb army came under NATO bombardment. Although Holbrooke (and other American negotiators) told Tudjman that "there was no excuse for the brutal treatment of Serbs," he pointedly abstained from putting any pressure on the Croats to desist. To the contrary, when John Shattuck, the Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, described the misery of the endless streams of Serbian refugees fleeing eastward, Holbrooke agreed with a colleague that "this is no time to get squeamish." For the sake of his immediate objectives, the same kind of ethnic cleansing he had found criminally abhorrent in 1993 could be accepted, if not encouraged, in 1995.

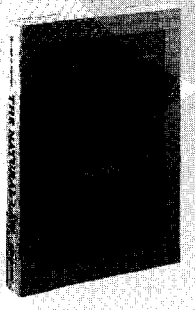
And what were those objectives? For Holbrooke, "the shape of the diplomatic landscape will usually reflect the balance of forces on the ground." Since the United States was not going to send its own troops to intervene, Croatian conquests seemed as good a way as any to coerce the Bosnian Serbs into accepting the peace terms Holbrooke was proposing. Fortunately for him, his lack of squeamishness concerning the plight of Serbian civilians was shared not only by Tudjman but also by Serbia's president Milosevic.

To End a War is full of praise for Milosevic's "tactical flexibility and superb negotiating skills"; his superior mind, which quickly "assimilate[s] every nuance of documents written in English"; and his stamina during negotiations. But Holbrooke's book, extracts of which have been published in the Belgrade press, is likely to damage Milosevic's standing among his fellow Serbs. In it they can see how the man they once worshipped as a great patriot—in the West he was seen, more accurately, as a bellicose chauvinist—accepted the expulsion of Serbs from Croatia and western Bosnia with what Holbrooke extols as equanimity but which was really utter callousness, a means toward lifting the international economic sanctions imposed against Yugoslavia in 1992. No wonder he excites the admiration of the American negotiator.

What Holbrooke was after in Bosnia was not justice, in short, but

Classics for Readers Today

The Natural Law
A Study in Legal and Social History and Philosophy
By Heinrich A. Rommen
Introduction by Russell Hittinger



Originally published in German in 1936, *The Natural Law* is the first work to clarify the differences between traditional natural law as represented in the writings of Cicero, Aquinas, and Hooker and the revolutionary doctrines of natural rights espoused by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. Beginning with the legacies of Greek and Roman life and thought, Rommen traces the natural law tradition to its displacement by legal positivism and concludes with what the author calls "the reappearance" of natural law thought in more recent times. In seven chapters each Rommen explores "The History of the Idea of Natural Law" and "The Philosophy and Content of the Natural Law." In his introduction, Russell Hittinger places Rommen's work in the context of contemporary debate on the relevance of natural law to philosophical inquiry and constitutional interpretation.

Heinrich Rommen (1897–1967) taught in Germany and England before concluding his distinguished scholarly career at Georgetown University.

Russell Hittinger is professor of philosophy and law at the University of Tulsa.

229 + xxii pages. Introduction, translator's preface, select bibliography, index.

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collaboration. If only Karadzic and Mladic—the two Serbs he "simply hated"—had been more cooperative, it is quite possible they, too, would have escaped indictment for what they did to Bosnian Muslims.

Nor do the consequences of his shoot-from-the-hip diplomacy seem to concern Holbrooke overmuch. He is proud of the American accomplishment in forcing the Serbs to lift the siege of Sarajevo and in reuniting the city, but he severely underplays the fact that the Muslims launched an offensive from Sarajevo immediately thereafter, and that hardly any non-Muslims now live there. As for the reunification of Bosnia itself—the larger *raison d'être* of Holbrooke's plan—the simple truth is that virtually no refugees are returning, which makes the common Muslim-Serbian-Croatian government a meaningless construct; not reunification but partition remains the rule in the former Yugoslavia.

Does he care? Though he makes dutiful references to the beauties of the multiethnic culture of Bosnia and the former Yugoslavia, Holbrooke evinces virtually no interest in the place. Among his many pretentious quotations from literature and poetry, Yugoslav authors are conspicuous by their absence. By contrast, he can be found here uttering or agreeing with statements deprecating this "self-destructive" and "savage" land, with its "Balkan mentality." Of course, this, like his assertion that Serbs are not "rational people with whom one could argue, negotiate, compromise, and agree," may not be intentionally defamatory but merely another excuse for self-dramatization.

"The world will look to Washington for more than rhetoric the next time we face a challenge to peace," Holbrooke concludes. In Kosovo today, that challenge is already quite manifest; the war about which Holbrooke writes in *To End a War* is far from ended. One can only hope that, just as the world looks to Washington for more than rhetoric, Washington will some day reciprocate with a more principled brand of diplomacy than the adventurist and morally pernicious variety described and recommended here.

Birth of the New

Impressionism:
Reflections and Perceptions
by Meyer Schapiro
Braziller. 359 pp. $50.00

Reviewed by
Steven C. Munson

"IF CÉZANNE is right, then I must be right," said Henri Matisse, succinctly alluding to what united and to what differentiated the two men in their respective struggles to create new forms of painting. In acknowledging a debt to Cézanne, Matisse, who died in 1954, was more generally acknowledging his debt as a modernist to the 19th-century movement with which Cézanne had been associated. That movement is the subject of a new book by the late Meyer Schapiro.

Impressionism: Reflections and Perceptions is an expansion of six lectures Schapiro gave at Indiana University in 1961. A long-time professor at Columbia, regarded as America's leading art historian until his death in 1996, Schapiro was, in the account of those who had an opportunity to hear him, a great teacher. *Impressionism* makes it very clear why he was so renowned. The experience of reading his transcribed words—Schapiro was famous for speaking extemporaneously, which allowed him to approach with renewed freshness the pictures he was planning to discuss—is one of pure pleasure. In these dense and richly rewarding essays, Schapiro addresses his subject with such lively and sympathetic understanding, and with such attentiveness to the needs of his audience, that one feels from the first an intimate and profound connection both to the man and to his scholarship.

The depth and breadth of that scholarship are breathtaking. In offering an explanation of what Impressionism was, and why it emerged in mid-19th-century France, Schapiro brings to bear a vast knowledge of history, literature, science, politics, psychology, music, and philosophy. Although it is impossible in a short space to do justice to the range, complexity, and subtlety of his thought, several points emerge from Schapiro's account that are relevant not only to an understanding of Impressionism but also to a consideration of our art today and our efforts to come to terms with it.

The first is that Impressionism, while evolving from the tradition that began with the Renaissance—and in particular from the Realist movement of the early decades of the 19th century—entailed a fairly complete overturning of established ways of thinking about and making oil paintings. Artists in earlier periods had tended, among other things, to paint variations on themes from history, mythology, and literature; to depict nature with the aim of provoking certain psychological or spiritual states of mind; and to present daily life by means of narrative or anecdotal illustration. Although the Impressionists* continued to paint people and places, they

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STEVEN C. MUNSON, *a civil servant and a painter, lives in Washington, D.C.*

* There was considerable variation in temperament, working methods, and subject matter among Impressionist painters, some of whom were given to quite radical experimentation. The names Schapiro cites as being most frequently associated with the movement include Claude Monet (whom he calls the "exemplary Impressionist"), Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Camille Pissarro, Alfred Sisley, Berthe Morisot, Edouard Manet, Gustave Caillebotte, Edgar Degas, Frédéric Bazille, Armand Guillaumin, Paul Cézanne, and the American Mary Cassatt.

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had no interest in giving their pictures dramatic or moral content. Their goal was to recreate on canvas the intensity of what Schapiro calls "the aesthetic moments in everyday life."

In depicting such moments—a train arriving at a station, a group of Parisians out for an excursion along the Seine, or a stack of grain standing in a field—the Impressionists were acting on impulses that were deeply in tune with an incipient shift in social consciousness, in how people felt and thought and experienced their environment, both natural and man-made. As Schapiro writes:

> The new themes of art were founded on pleasurable experience under conditions of freer movement—through the streets, the railroads, and the resorts—in a changing world that was beginning to show the effects of science on industry and of the energies of ambitious enterprise in other fields.

This was surely the underlying reason for the ultimate appeal of Impressionist pictures, which were initially greeted with hostility and derision on account of their jettisoning of traditional ideas about color, contour, and perspective.

But what enabled the Impressionists to make this breakthrough? According to Shapiro—and this is the second critical point to emerge from his account—it was a turning away from politics and social commentary within the world of the arts. Many French intellectuals, artists, and poets had been caught up in the radical politics of the mid-19th century; but now "they found new goals in the possibility of developing a sphere of art in which the individual sensation or perception [was] self-sufficient." It was, writes Schapiro,

> that brief moment in which a radical individualism in the arts inherited not only a political disillusionment and quiescence, but also the preceding insurgent Realism and the significance of color, sensation, and movement as values connected with freedom, rebelliousness, and authenticity in the experiences of nature and the urban surroundings.

In order to record their encounters with nature and the new urban world springing up in mid-19th-century Paris, the Impressionists invented extraordinary new techniques for transposing their immediate sensations of color, light, atmosphere, and movement. In Schapiro's telling, the essential traits of the Impressionist style were four in number:

> First, the predominance of the [brush] stroke as a building unit of the whole; second, the distinctiveness of the surface as a weave on the canvas; third, the taste for randomness as a mode of composition in which colors are averaged or brought into harmony; and fourth, the fact of transformation, whereby every canvas by an Impressionist is experienced both as an image and as a painted surface.

These innovations—and here is the third key point—proved vastly influential. For in their approach to the basic problems of painting, the Impressionists created much more than a new style; they set the stage for the entire subsequent development of modern art.

It is true, as Schapiro points out, that a reaction against Impressionism set in even before the movement had run its course. But without the Impressionists it is difficult if not impossible to imagine the achievements of Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gaugin, and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec; of Georges Seurat and Pierre Bonnard; of Wassily Kandinsky and Paul Klee; or—to cite Schapiro's own juxtaposition—of Piet Mondrian and Jackson Pollock. According to Schapiro, one can find Impressionist features in modern movements that seem the least Impressionist—including Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, and German Expressionism, as well as abstract painting. Those same values are still alive today, though admittedly spread a bit thin.

One reason they are spread so thin is that, over the past four decades, the aesthetic heralded by Impressionism has taken a terrible beating at the hands of a number of "postmodern" movements—perhaps fads would be a better word—whose goals have varied from the subversively frivolous to the overtly destructive. Much of what has been produced in the way of art in recent years amounts to a hollow triumph of ever more sophisticated and ever more sterile technique or of a proudly demonstrated lack of seriousness. To make matters worse, politics of the most virulent sort has come to be both the motive and subject of much artistic endeavor. The upshot is that a great deal of

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our art has become a barrier to understanding or responding to our shared experience.

This has led to considerable cynicism—and confusion—about modernism itself, which is seen in some quarters as being continuous with the careless excesses and dubious successes of the most alienating postmodern tendencies. Today, for example, one can read in a reputable weekly magazine a lengthy article criticizing the modern design of the East Wing of the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., that omits any discussion of the Matisses, Picassos, Modiglianis, or other great works of art on display there and never addresses the question of why so many people feel a desire to go and look at them and seem to enjoy the experience of doing so.

The irony is that it was precisely this sort of disillusionment with the expressive powers of art that modernism once protected us from. For it was the genius of the modern movement in painting (and other arts) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to break down the barriers between the experience of art and the experience of life, and to do so in profoundly original and uplifting ways. The fact that the forms and styles invented by modern artists were considered shocking at first or difficult to understand did not prevent their ultimate acceptance by a public that came to appreciate their beauty or humor; their complexity and weightiness; their immediacy of feeling; or their emotional and psychological resonance. In the modern world, with its loss of faith and certainty, this art came to provide a sublime alternative to despair.

SCHAPIRO BROACHES the issue of modern art's appeal in typical fashion: by taking the long view. Referring to the Impressionists' choice of subjects, he writes:

> The spectator who enjoys these sights in pictures may be unaware of or insensitive to the painter's choice of tones and the painter's refined expression of light . . . , but the spectator's own response to that original scene is also an aesthetic one. Like the painter, the spectator delights in the colors and brightness of the landscape, . . . and he remembers afterward the charm of performers and the multiple sensations of the summer day in the country or at the beach. . . . How different is this unreflective response from the pious reactions to religious art in the past?

What applies here to Impressionism—which, as Schapiro reminds us, went from being scorned and dismissed by such figures as Henry James (he later changed his mind) to being universally admired—applies in a different sense to much of the art that followed it. And that is why, for anyone who still believes that modernism is the most viable artistic tradition we have, the Impressionists—so memorably described by one of their affronted critics as those "five lunatics and a woman"—will remain both a touchstone and a source of inspiration.

Faith Healer

The Dissent of the Governed: A Meditation on Law, Religion, and Loyalty
by Stephen L. Carter
Harvard. 167 pp. $19.95

Reviewed by
Gary Rosen

IN MANY ways, Stephen L. Carter, a professor of law at Yale, embodies the rival impulses now at work in American liberalism. On the one hand, he has shown himself to be keenly aware of the social and cultural damage wrought under the liberal banner. His first book, *Reflections of an Affirmative Action Baby* (1991), eloquently described the stigma that attaches to those blacks, like himself, who have benefited from racial preferences. His second, *The Culture of Disbelief* (1993), was the work of a believing Christian weary of the hostility shown by liberal American elites to all but the most private expressions of religious faith. More recently, in books like *Integrity* (1996) and *Civility* (1998), he has bemoaned our ever-sinking standards of conduct and character.

Yet, on the other hand, for all his readiness to sound such themes, Carter has been reluctant to endorse the reforms that seem naturally to flow from them, declaring himself either an agnostic on questions of policy or an anguished friend of the status quo. This tension, between rightly identifying problems and offering responsible solutions to them, is very much on display in his latest work, a slender volume based on his 1995 Massey lectures at Harvard.

CARTER BEGINS by taking a second look at the Declaration of Independence. What really agitated the American colonists, he claims, was not their lack of say-so in the British regime (usually considered the heart of the dispute), but rather the king's open indifference to their grievances. As the Declaration memorably puts it, "In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned for redress in the most humble terms: our repeated petitions have been answered only by repeated injury." On this view, the American Revolution was sparked by a "failure of *dissent*"—that is, by dissent ignored and rebuffed.

Heeding this lesson is especially urgent now, Carter argues, because we too face a looming problem of "disallegiance." If the villain in 1776 was an unresponsive monarch, today it is "the project of liberal con-

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GARY ROSEN *is associate editor of* COMMENTARY.

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stitutionalism," which aims to use federal power to create a single, nationwide regime of rights. Though Carter acknowledges that this effort has helped secure, among other things, the rights of blacks, he criticizes its "totalizing" ambitions. More specifically, he worries that the various agents of liberal constitutionalism, in their unyielding promotion of universal values, have deeply alienated the country's religious believers.

Particularly troublesome, Carter maintains, has been the Supreme Court. In a string of First Amendment cases dealing with matters as diverse as prayer in the public schools, wearing a *yarmulke* in the armed forces, and the use of peyote in Indian religious rites, the modern Court has shown scant interest in accommodating the practical needs of the devout. Almost as vexing to believers, the dominant voices in our public discourse now reject out of hand any argument that takes faith as its starting point.

Such secular absolutism, Carter observes, is a fairly recent development among liberals. While today it spares them from having to grapple with the arguments of anti-abortion or school-choice advocates, in days past it would have kept them from breaking bread with the irreducibly Christian Martin Luther King, Jr., and with Bible-thumping abolitionists.

Carter hastens to say that he does not necessarily take the side of the religiously aggrieved in these disputes. His point is that the contest has become lopsided, and thus dangerous. Communities and families feel robbed of the ability to "preserve their narratives," to adhere to the beliefs that help them "make sense of the world." More and more, they find themselves confronted by a stark choice: "follow the law or follow your God." If we are to avoid outright conflict, it is imperative, says Carter, that we discover a way to make room for the struggle of the devout to "serve more than one master."

To this end, he proposes several reforms for the courts. At the most general level, he would like to see judges interpret the religion clauses of the Constitution more "responsively," that is, by going beyond the letter of the law to take into account the "moral instincts" of their fellow citizens, especially those who, in the fashion of the Declaration, have made known their discontent through "repeated petitions." As for cases in which citizens openly violate the law in the name of religious duty—and here Carter boldly cites the example of the anti-abortion group Operation Rescue—judges should at least give them a chance to argue their cause. If a jury then wishes to "nullify" the charges against them, so be it.

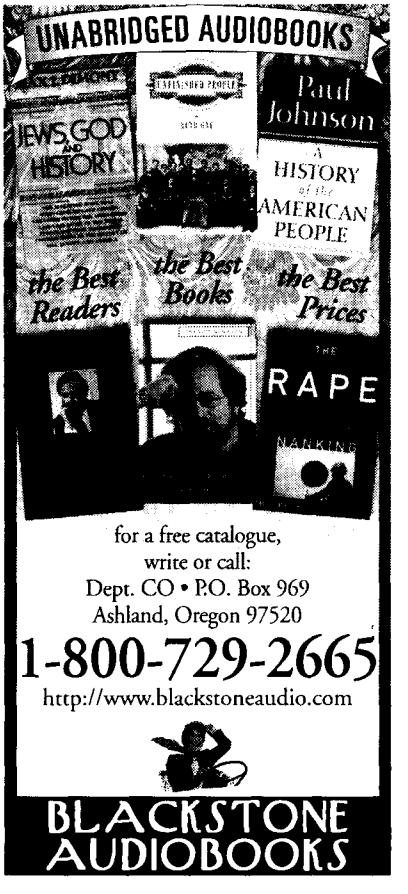
For Carter, the American "sovereign" (as he incessantly calls the U.S. government) has long dealt too harshly with those who make the difficult choice to stand apart on account of religious conviction. Such hostility is both self-destructive, turning "disobedients" into "disallegianists," and ultimately short-sighted. After all, he concludes, it is "precisely through its ability to understand the motives and meanings of dissenters" that a democracy such as ours "often achieves moral progress."

There is much good sense in *The Dissent of the Governed*—too much, one suspects, for its original Harvard audience, whom Carter seems to have gone out of his way to provoke. ("Born-again Christians are woefully underrepresented at the nation's elite campuses," he puckishly observes, "but when was the last time students or faculty organized to demand that more be hired?") And there is also much to praise in his basic diagnosis of the discontent that has been bred by the overreaching of the federal government, particularly the courts.

But if Carter is right to point to liberal constitutionalism as a problem, his solutions to that problem unfortunately partake of the same habits of mind that brought us to this pass in the first place.

Carter wants judges to be more sensitive to the likely reception of their rulings among religious dissenters. But are judges, in the isolation of their chambers, either equipped or authorized to do this? And do we really want to give them yet another excuse to enlarge their ever-widening domain? Still more disturbing is the protection that Carter wishes to extend to those who feel compelled by faith to break the law. Are we really to start down the road toward yet another new class of rights, this one designed with the very purpose of disrupting public order?

As Carter correctly notes, religious dissent does not always fit



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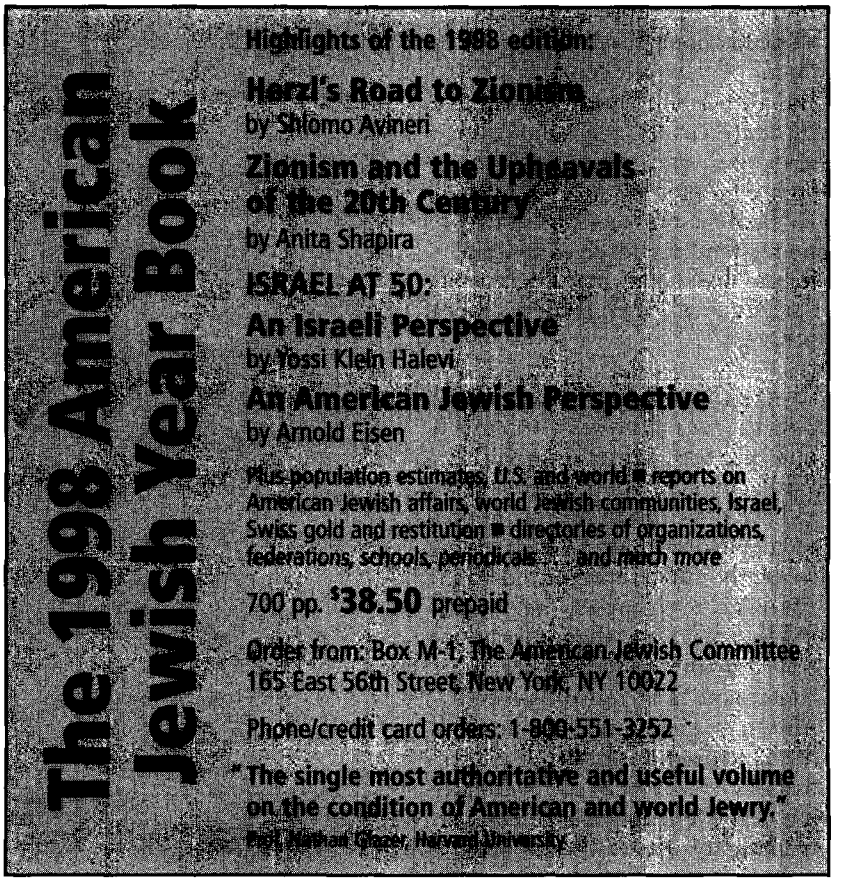
neatly within the confines of the law; in this connection he invokes to powerful effect Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." But today's dissenters are not nearly so deprived as yesterday's of lawful means by which to seek their ends. In this light, Carter's "reconstruction" of the Declaration of Independence is especially wrongheaded, leading him to cast religious Americans in a struggle against a distant, unfeeling federal "sovereign," lacking only the ermine and purple of George III.

It bears repeating, however, that in America the people are sovereign. While Carter wrings his hands over an imminent crisis of legitimacy, most of those for whom he claims to speak have already been expressing their displeasure, not in "disallegience" but in the much healthier form of political activism. Carter, by contrast, is reluctant to have religious dissenters take to the hustings. A "continuing moral witness," he writes, "is always superior to entrance into electoral politics." This, alas, is moralistic grandstanding at its worst—and, practically speaking, an invitation to marginalization and extremism.

The real problem for Carter is that the political agenda embraced by his would-be constituency is a conservative one; here as elsewhere in his writings, he will not allow himself to keep such company. Though an ostensible supporter of autonomy for local communities, for example, he dismisses the revival of federalism now under way as "a celebration of unwilled and arbitrary geographic divisions." And for someone so familiar with the repercussions of judicial activism, he has little use for strict construction of the Constitution, a doctrine that would have slowed, if not prevented, the Supreme Court's reckless imposition of a single national standard on so many inflammatory issues, from abortion to gay rights.

Even when Carter's constitutional views are more consonant with his premises, he cannot take the step necessary to complete the circle. Thus, though publicly-funded vouchers for religious schools pass First Amendment muster in his view, he pointedly withholds any endorsement of the policy itself. Time and again, one encounters some version of his all-purpose disclaimer: "I am not actually advocating. . . ."

None of this is to deny Stephen Carter's important contribution to a heated, ongoing debate. The ministry he has chosen is a laudable one, instructing liberal sectarians in the true demands of their creed of tolerance. On these fundamental matters, his is plainly a voice for reason. Regrettably, it is not also a voice for change.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The Old Gang

Tough Jews: Fathers, Sons, and Gangster Dreams
by Rich Cohen
Simon & Schuster. 288 pp. $25.00

Reviewed by
Adam J. Levitin

WHEN HOLLYWOOD moviemakers conjure up the gangster demimonde, they almost always reserve a bit part for a Jewish character—the mousy lawyer or accountant who nervously shuffles in to do the paperwork. Exceptions like Warren Beatty's *Bugsy* notwithstanding, the Jew in gangster movies tends to get a ledger

ADAM J. LEVITIN, *here making his first appearance in* COMMENTARY, *is a recent graduate of Harvard College.*

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and a satchel; the Italian heavies get tommy guns and stilettos. Even in crime, it would seem, the Jewish contribution is brains.

In *Tough Jews*, Rich Cohen, a writer for *Rolling Stone*, sets out to explode this particular stereotype, rehearsing the deeds of the legendary brawlers and assassins of Jewish organized crime in America. More ambitiously, he attacks the purportedly commonplace idea that "Jews are supposed to be weak." As he sees it, the Jewish thugs of yesteryear are more than mere curiosities, symbols of the less savory side of an immigrant success story. They *are* the success story—model Jews, every one of them.

Most of *Tough Jews* is devoted to describing the rise and fall of the particular gangster band that styled itself "Murder Inc." Based in Brooklyn's Brownsville neighborhood during the 1930's and early 1940's, it included among its memorably-monikered members the likes of Abraham "Kid Twist" Reles, Harry "Pep" Strauss, "Dutch Schultz," and "Tick-Tock" Tannenbaum.

The group started out as a strictly local affair, killing off rival Jewish gangs in order to establish its own dominance. Before long, however, its talents came to the attention of the wider, Italian-dominated underworld of the Mafia. Kept on retainer as hitmen for various mob families, the members of Murder Inc. soon established a niche for themselves, executing sentences against "cheats," "rats," and other unfortunates. Ruthless and efficient, they "did for organized crime," observes Cohen in a characteristically grandiose phrase, "what Henry Ford did for the automobile."

Unsurprisingly, these assassins also felt little compunction about betraying one another. Many eventually turned state's evidence, testifying in court against their erstwhile associates. By the mid-1940's, most of Murder Inc. was either behind bars for a long stay or en route to the electric chair. The age of American Jewish gangsterism had ended and with it, Cohen laments, the age of "tough Jews." Thereafter, Murder Inc. and all it stood for would live on only as fantasy—or, for young Jews who followed the gang's exploits in the 30's and 40's, as a kind of alternative career aspiration.

Among those young Jews were Cohen's own father and his childhood chums from Brownsville, and Cohen's lurid accounts of gangster mayhem in *Tough Jews* are framed by vignettes of this "gang," members of a high-school club called the Warriors. Now rich and secure—their number includes the TV personality Larry King (né Zeiger)—they like to gather in a Los Angeles deli to reminisce, and above all to take delight in the thought that, growing up, they were just a step removed from their more sanguinary co-religionists.

And that brings us to a major theme of Cohen's book. Thanks to the gangsters, Cohen maintains, young men like his father had at least a mental alternative to the cult of victimhood that, in the aftermath of the Holocaust, would develop among so many American Jews. Long before Israel's military prowess met the same need, Murder Inc. epitomized Jewish manliness. In their "physical power," Kid Twist, Dutch Schultz, and the others had something that successful Jews like his father and Larry King still "crave"—and that younger generations desperately need. Indeed, if Jewish gangsters were around today, Cohen argues, anti-Semites would have to think twice. Jewish children would not get beaten up in playground pogroms, and, in Israel, "there would be no Wailing Wall. It would be the Don't-Fuck-with-Me Wall!"

What is there to say about this exercise in callowness? Is one obliged to take note of its author's adolescent style (see above), his sophomoric stabs at cultural generalization? Is it really necessary to point out that the members of Murder Inc., far from constituting a bulwark against anti-Semitism, were equal-opportunity brutes, happily extorting, robbing, and murdering their fellow Jews? Or that they themselves fared far worse in the end than their brethren working at what Cohen calls "sucker jobs"?

What is certainly true is that many American Jews today, while enjoying unprecedented wealth and status, tend to make a virtue, or even a fetish, of their historic insecurity, to revel in the idea of Jewish victimhood. But the mindless macho posturing of Rich Cohen is only the other and much more pathetic face of this same insecurity—mixed, in his case, with palpable self-loathing.

"When I was growing up," Cohen writes, "any mention of Jews as Jews would make me cringe. . . . I really knew of only one type of Jew: cerebral bourgeois kids-to-college suburbanites." Poor, pampered,

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parochial Rich Cohen, reduced to the gutter to find models of Jewish behavior that will not make him "cringe." Although it is nice that he wants to honor his father, there is actually more to American Jewish experience than is dreamt of in the delicatessens of Los Angeles. One would just never know it from this pop-gun of a book.

Closet Feminists?

The Right Women: A Journey Through the Heart of Conservative America

by Elinor Burkett

Scribner. 288 pp. $23.00

Reviewed by
Richard Brookhiser

THE ELECTIONS of 1994 swept into office a class of Republican freshmen that included seven women, among them such conservative fire-eaters as Idaho's Helen Chenoweth, one of whose campaign events was an "endangered-salmon" bake. Elinor Burkett, a one-time professor of history and former reporter for the *Miami Herald*, says she was tempted to write off these right-wing women "as pawns of men or unenlightened slobs." Then, Burkett had a moment of enlightenment. Hearing in her own thoughts "a nasty, patronizing, and holier-than-thou arrogance," she realized that she knew more about "women journalists and academics in Paris, Tokyo, or Buenos Aires" than about American female conservatives. And so she set out to correct her ignorance.

Part Lewis and Clark, part Candide, Burkett spent two years interviewing dozens of women, from Capitol Hill to the Curl Up and Dye beauty parlor in Libby, Montana. *The Right Women* presents her findings in thematic chapters—religious women, businesswomen, libertarians, Beltway apparatchiks—little encumbered with survey research or theorizing. All the usual conservative poster girls are here, from Patrick J. Buchanan's sister Bay to the lawyer and pundit Laura Ingraham. But most of Burkett's subjects make their public debut in her pages.

Probably the two most significant groups Burkett encountered were owners of small businesses and evangelical Christians. Of the nation's 22 million small businesses, more than eight million, reports Burkett, are owned by women. By virtue of their position, these entrepreneurs are overwhelmingly conservative on economic matters like taxes and regulation. "The Clintons' health-care plan infuriated them," Burkett writes, especially the blithe indifference to the interests of small business revealed in Hillary Clinton's declaration that "she could not be held responsible for 'every undercapitalized entrepreneur in America.'"

Female born-again Christians are even more numerous than businesswomen, though not always so politically engaged. At Cornerstone, the nation's largest Christian rock festival, Burkett asked a miniskirted young woman with dyed red hair, twelve earrings, and a pierced nose and navel if she had any interest in politics or feminism. "Why should I need either when I have the Lord?" the metal girl answered. These pages of *The Right Women* can descend to journalistic gawking, but are not devoid of sympathetic insight. Evangelical women, Burkett comes to see, do not consider the rules of their faith "the pronouncements of men" but rather "the dictates of God"; to suggest otherwise, she concludes, is to show "condescension and contempt" for women who, far from being "cowed into submission" by men, are "full-bodied, equal partners in faith."

The less populous precincts of the Right offer equally vivid vignettes. Burkett introduces us to a "lieutenant colonel" in the 51st Missouri Militia (the number is in honor of the 51 Branch Davidians who died at Waco). We meet a Pennsylvania woman who markets a line of custom clothes in which the pants and slacks have reinforced waistbands to hold firearms in place. In the Bronx, a convert to Islam takes comfort in her veil: "You don't put a gem out in the middle of a mall. . . . When I'm covered, I feel like a precious stone." In Mississippi, a black Republican congressional candidate declares that the Democratic party is dominated by "anti-fetus feminists and self-absorbed homosexuals." And so forth.

ON THE whole, Burkett maintains an admirable open-mindedness throughout *The Right Women*. The only conservatives who seem to rub her the wrong way are intellectuals and polemicists like the historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and the journalist Danielle Crittenden. Since Burkett is herself an academic turned journalist, their apostasy from modern feminism may well strike too close to home.

But this raises the question of what Burkett makes of all her subjects. She herself is a member of the white elite that gave birth to feminism—she comes from a secular Jewish family on the Philadelphia Main Line—and she sees herself as a beneficiary of the women's movement. But she also acknowledges that her feminist soulmates have nothing to say to the lively conservative countercultures she has discovered.

She reconciles her two worlds by arguing that, in charging into politics, or in assuming control of their lives in other ways, right-wing women are really feminists after all—*de facto*, if not by affiliation. Conservative American women "are not turning their backs on the ideals of the women's movement,"

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she writes. "They are living up to those ideals by deciding for themselves what creates a rich life, by refusing to march in lockstep with anyone—even their so-called sisters."

But the claim that conservative women should be properly understood as feminists simply will not fly. Modern feminism is not merely about self-assertion; it also insists that not only men but most social institutions, starting with the family, are linked in an oppressive alliance known as the "patriarchy." When, by contrast, Burkett's subjects say things like, "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," the selves they are asserting stand against the proclivities of contemporary feminism. If anything, Burkett's subjects (at least some of them) fit within a long historical line of American women who have been influential in social and political movements—revivalism, temperance, abolition, suffrage—without being in the least like feminists in the modern sense.

Still, if Burkett's main argument about conservative women is off the mark, she could not be more to the point about the nature of the United States. Foreign travelers from Crèvecoeur and Tocqueville on have been struck by America's homogeneity; today, the increasing sameness of the country has become a staple of cultural punditry. But time and again, Burkett marvels, rather, at what a big and discontinuous place our country is, "not so much a heterogeneous society as a patchwork of homogeneous societies living together cheek by jowl yet remarkably isolated from one another." And if this is true of American society as a whole, it is also true of its smaller, constituent parts.

One may forgive Elinor Burkett's naive amazement at discovering that there is a conservative stream "out there" at all; but one must be grateful to her for reminding us of its many tributaries, rills, and rivulets. Although she makes a muddle of the label "feminist," her breezy, garrulous, and lively book tells us something significant about America's colorful and infinite variety.

The West & the Rest

The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor

by David S. Landes

Norton. 650 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
David Gress

Why is the West not like the rest? That is the old question raised by Adam Smith, Max Weber, and other titans of modern social thought. Now the Harvard historian David S. Landes has tackled it anew in a work of deep historical scholarship and charmingly lucid prose.

The very terms of Landes's inquiry represent a departure from much historical writing today. For over two decades, the postmodernists, relativists, and multiculturalists who dominate the history departments have denigrated the big, interesting, and important questions about human social evolution. Either these questions are said to be unanswerable, or they are deemed irrelevant to such "vital" contemporary concerns as gender and identity. Thankfully, at the same time the horizons of many academic historians have narrowed, a few unconventional scholars, Landes among them, have resolutely begun to widen theirs. What they have found is both more significant and more impressive than anything uncovered by world historians of an earlier era like Arnold Toynbee.

The astonishing fact about world history today is that the big questions—how societies came to be as they are, what causes them to change—can actually be answered on a far more solid basis of evidence than ever before. Although, as Landes writes, "no one has a simple answer" to the question of why some nations are rich and some poor, some democratic and others not, we do know that sustained development had a beginning in a particular time and place: namely, Europe, or to be more precise, England, in the 18th century. Without assuming that because the West became both rich and free it was fated to become so, or that the path to wealth and liberty is an easy one to follow, Landes enables us to separate out the elements that make for success.

He does so by setting the career of the West in a fruitful comparative context. By exploring the paths taken by China, India, Islamic societies, Africa, and Latin America—paths that led to poverty and stagnation—he highlights and isolates the peculiar symbiosis of elements that characterizes the rise and fall of nations. He also puts to rest—once and for all, one hopes—the notion that Western modernization was achieved at the expense of the East and South.

To this notion—that European prosperity was built on the backs of Chinese inventors, black African slaves, or Asian traders—Landes makes the obvious reply: if, as some historians assert, the Asians were civilizationally far ahead before being despoiled by rapacious Europeans, why was it the latter who showed up in the Indian Ocean to trade and conquer, and not the former in the North Sea? As for the inventions—gunpowder, paper, and printing—often touted by those who assert Chinese primacy in particular, these, Landes demonstrates, existed for centuries in China without spurring economic progress. By

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David Gress, *a fellow of the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia and of the Danish Institute of International Affairs, is the author of* From Plato to NATO: The Idea of the West and Its Opponents *(Free Press).*

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contrast, no sooner had they arrived in Europe than they were deployed to multiply power, skills, and mobility and to spark a wave of innovation that in next to no time surpassed anything to be found in Asia.

WHAT, THEN, *did* enable Europe to take off as it did? Fundamental to its breakout, in Landes's view, was its favorable geography: a temperate climate of mild winters and wet summers that permitted hard work and, crucially, farming without the necessity of large-scale irrigation. In stressing this last point, Landes rehabilitates the work of Karl Wittfogel, who, in *Oriental Despotism* (1957), held that societies like China with a resource base of large rivers and irrigated fields could only survive on the basis of forced labor and the expropriation of power and energy by a ruthless central authority.

As Wittfogel also pointed out, the Soviet Union under Communism resurrected this crippling and tyrannical system of government. But Landes is no geographical determinist. Fair weather and the like are not enough; it takes people and incentives to bring about change. To geography, therefore, one must add politics, culture, and values. The politics, in Europe's case, were those of a fragmented continent where rulers had to temper power with justice; if they did not, their most productive subjects would find a way to emigrate. This again provides a contrast to the equally skilled but less fortunate Chinese, who, no matter what kind of regime was imposed on them, had nowhere to turn.

As for culture and values, the Europeans were a people who married late, spaced the births of their children, and maintained just enough population pressure to encourage efficient use of resources without swamping fragile economies. Of course, before economic growth took off in the 18th century, these habits and values were not always decisive: famines and plagues culled the European population as they culled others. The point is that Europe's cultural attributes were already in place, and had been in place from deep within the medieval past.

In arguing for the role of culture, Landes in effect carries out another rehabilitation—in this instance of Max Weber, whose notion that Calvinist Protestantism peculiarly promoted habits of investment and innovation has not been popular with historians in recent years. But why not? Weber, writes Landes, was clearly right, both theoretically and empirically: "The heart of the matter lay indeed in the making of a new kind of man," at once "rational, ordered, diligent, productive," and aware of time. Concerning this last capacity, Landes, building here on his previous book, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (1983), shows just how significant to economic development have been the desire and the ability to measure time independently of sun, weather, and stars.

LANDES'S WIDE-RANGING excursion makes it clear, then, that Europe achieved its position of predominance by an ever-shifting mix of geopolitics, culture, values, and opportunities seized. Unfortunately, when it comes to declaring which among these elements was decisive, or even preeminent, he draws back and turns frustratingly coy. Thrusting before us a whole variety of determinants, and rightfully scorning single-cause theories, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* ends up explaining too much and, therefore, too little.

Still, there are hints, and the hints point to the absolutely indispensable role of cultural attitudes. In the final analysis, what seems to count most in Landes's view are "work, thrift, honesty, patience, tenacity." And therein lies a moral. As *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* indisputably demonstrates, there are no free lunches in the continuing global competition, and front-line societies, like those of the West, can fall behind. For this sobering and necessary reminder, too, we are in David Landes's debt.

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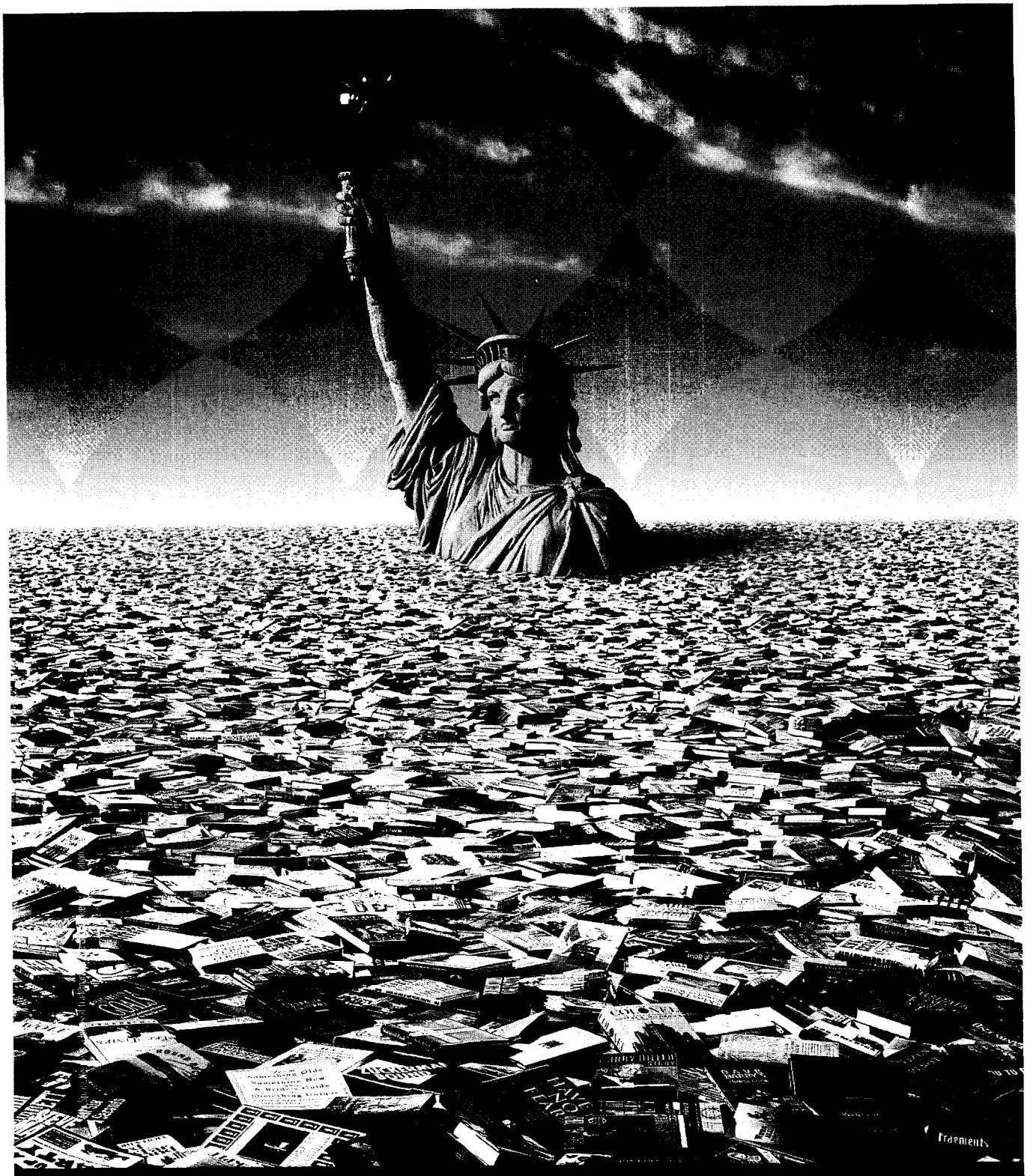

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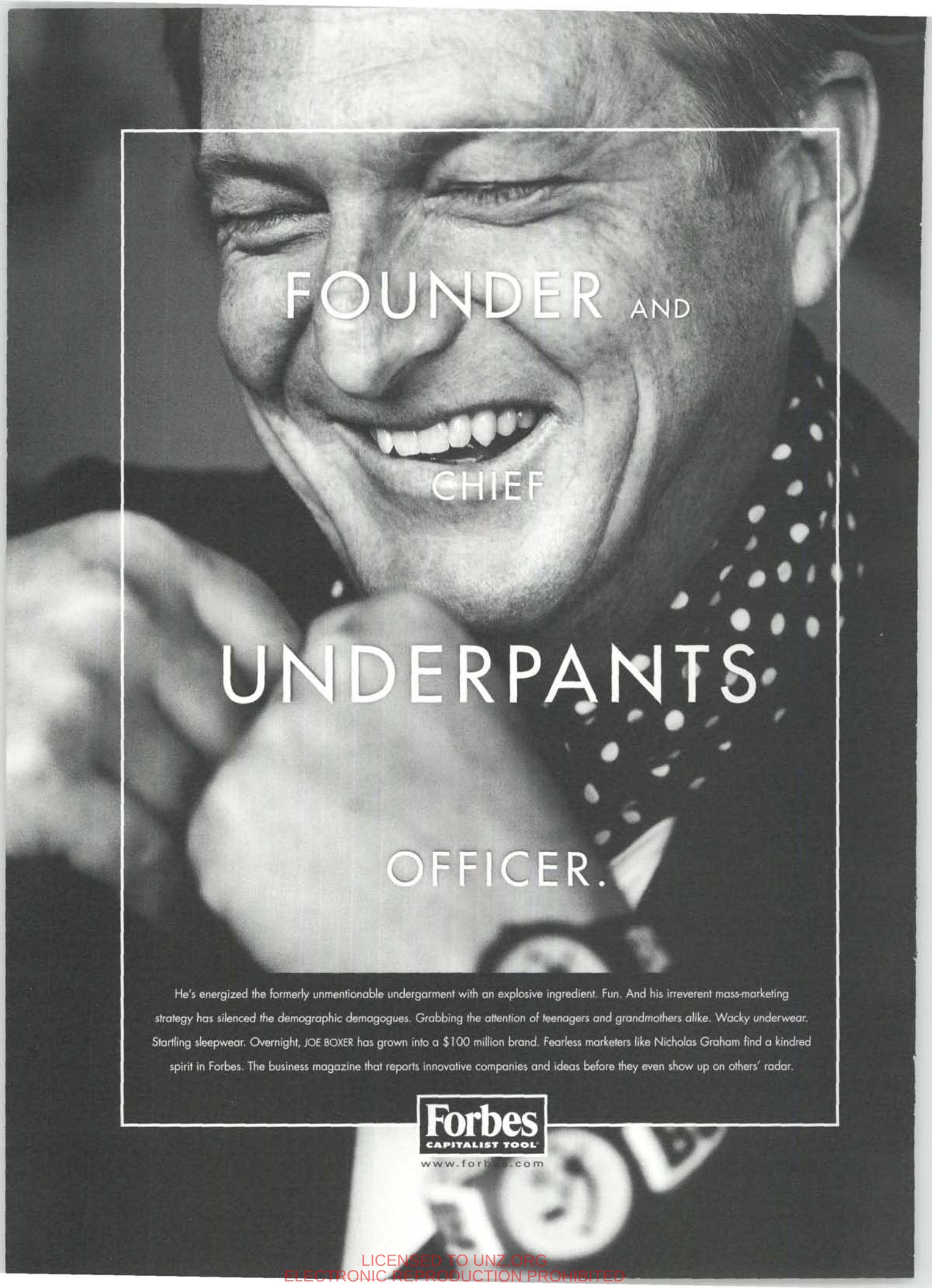

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